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# Symbolism in the Poetry of William Butler Yeats

Alana White
*Western Kentucky University*

# SYMBOLISM IN THE POETRY OF WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

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Alana J. White

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APPROVED June 8, 1932 :
(Date)

Dorothy Mc Mahon
Director of Thesis

George E McCelvey

Frank P. Steele

L. J. Sanderson
Dean of the Graduate School

I wish to dedicate this thesis to Dr. William McMahon and Dr. Dorothy McMahon for the kind assistance they have given me in this project and in other ways as well.

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## PREFACE

This thesis is a study of the development of the symbolic system formulated by William Butler Yeats and his subsequent application of this system to his poetry, with special attention to the rose and the stone. To comprehend and thereby fully appreciate Yeats's poetry requires some knowledge of the forces working together to form the basis of his philosophy and symbolic system. These forces and the system form the subject of the first chapter. Foremost among the many influences are his Irish birth, his associates (among them his father, John Yeats; his uncle, George Pollexfen; John O'Leary; and Madame Helena Blavatsky and others), and the writings of such figures as William Blake and Plato. Yeats's view of the artistic function of the imagination and of the symbol and the development of his personal symbolic system are made clear in this chapter.

Chapter Two focuses upon the rose and the stone as archetypal symbols. Much has been written concerning the symbolic rose, its historical development, and its application in art in general; therefore, the treatment of the rose in this chapter is primarily a review of Miss Seward's The Symbolic Rose. Apparently no scholar has considered the symbolic stone in depth. However, the second section of

Chapter Two focuses upon its role in literature as fully as possible.

The rose symbolism of Yeats's poetry is the subject of Chapter Three. Many scholars have commented upon Yeats's frequent use of the flower in his work, but few attempt to pin down its various functions. Thus, this study is to some extent a review of previous scholarship. But all has not been said which should be and few critics have been as specific about the poet's intent as I hope to be.

Few scholars, for whatever reason, have considered the stone symbolism so predominant in Yeats's work. I hope to illuminate the subject in Chapter Four of this thesis, following the same steps of development previously laid down for investigation of the rose.

The most original aspect of this study is the function of the rose and stone in Yeats's symbolic system, including specific attention to the embodiment of the symbolism in specific poems.

## CHAPTER I

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SYMBOLIC SYSTEM

When William Butler Yeats was in his early twenties a single sentence formed itself in his head: "Hammer your thoughts into unity"; for years, he writes in "If I Were Four-and-Twenty," "I tested all I did by that sentence."[1] He thus considered life and art inseparable. Understandably, then, his concept of reality as unity and his belief that symbols can evoke that reality evolved from his personal experiences and his synthesis of numerous systems of thought. Unity of various kinds dominated his mind from his youthful involvement in the movement for Irish nationalism to his later efforts to achieve "Unity of Being"[2] through poetry. During his youth, he hoped to help unify Ireland by gathering together her literature--the fairy tales, legends and myths--thus gathering together her people; when the attempt failed, "Unity of Being" in a

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[1] William Butler Yeats, Explorations (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 263.

[2] William Butler Yeats, Four Years: 1887-1891, in The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats, Collier Books (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 128. In Yeats's first reference to "Unity of Being," he says that he uses the term "as Dante used it when he compared beauty in the Convito to a perfectly proportioned human body."

personal sense became his immediate interest. While engaged in synthesizing an Irish mythology, he became interested in the occult and was introduced to specific occult doctrines. Concomitantly, he was familiarizing himself with the works and theories of other artists and philosophers, some of whose ideas eventually melted into his own. Finally, a unique, personal symbolic system emerged. Understanding Yeats's vision and his attempts to glimpse reality through symbolism is best possible when his lifelong interest in unity is more fully considered.

Yeats writes that as a young man he had three interests: "in a form of literature, in a form of philosophy, and a belief in nationality."[3] As Ronsley notes, the seeds of Yeats's interest in a unified Ireland lay in his Sligo childhood.[4] As a small child he often accompanied his grandmother as she visited Sligo gentlewomen, and he found walking with the servants more interesting than the women's chatter, for the servants' stories fascinated him. "All the well-known families had their grotesque or tragic or romantic legends," he recalls,[5] and he, it seems, heard most of them. Tales of visions, prophetic dreams, second-sighted servants--all were an integral part of his daily experiences.

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[3] Ibid.

[4] See Joseph Ronsley, Yeats's Autobiography: Life as Symbolic Pattern (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 47.

[5] William Butler Yeats, Reveries Over Childhood and Youth, in The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats, pp. 9-10.

His kinsmen's devotion to Ireland and their contempt for the English was also observed by him:

> Every one I knew well in Sligo despised Nationalists and Catholics, but all disliked England with a prejudice that had come down perhaps from the days of the Irish Parliament. I knew stories to the discredit of England, and took them all seriously.[6]

When his family moved to London in 1875, he experienced at first hand the widening gap between his native country and England: other students at the Godolphin School in Hammersmith chided his heritage and called him "Mad Irishman";[7] in turn, Yeats rejected English culture and history[8] for, he explains, "they thought of Cressy and Agincourt and the Union Jack and were all very patriotic, and I . . . thought of mountain and lake, of my grandfather and of ships."[9]

According to Ronsley, Yeats's interest in an Ireland free from English domination took serious direction under the influence of John O'Leary, whom he met at the Dublin Contemporary Club where politics was the usual topic and "nationalist sentiment prevailed." Although, as Ronsley points out, Yeats first attended the group discussions to overcome his shyness, O'Leary's dynamic personality and idealism charmed Yeats, and he became an active participant in the movement. He was never, however,

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[6] Ibid., p. 21.

[7] Ibid., p. 23.

[8] Ronsley, Yeats's Autobiography, p. 47.

[9] Reveries, in The Autobiography, p. 22.

so concerned with Irish nationalism as he was with the unity of Irish culture. To him, Ronsley explains, the latter meant spreading nationwide the aristocratic qualities of Protestant Ireland; in this way, Protestant culture, education and taste would combine with the passion which characterized Irish Catholicism.[10] This could be accomplished, he reasoned, by reviving Irish literature. As he later wrote in Reveries: "I thought we might bring the halves together if we had a national literature that made Ireland beautiful in the memory, and yet had been freed from provincialism by an exacting criticism, an European pose."[11] The revival, he hoped, would reawaken Ireland's soul through a resurrection of her mythology, for, as he speculates in Four Years: 1887-1891:

> Have not all races had their first unity from a mythology, that marries them to rock and hill? We had in Ireland imaginative stories, which the uneducated classes knew and even sang, and might we not make those stories current among the educated classes, rediscovering for the work's sake what I have called "the applied arts of literature," the association of literature, that is, with music, speech, and dance; and at last, it might be, so deepen the political passion of the nation that all, artist and poet, craftsman and day-labourer would accept a common design?[12]

At first the movement was partially successful. The Dublin University Review had published selections of Yeats's

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[10]Ronsley, Yeats's Autobiography, pp. 47-48, 120.

[11]The Autobiography, p. 68.

[12]The Trembling of the Veil, in The Autobiography, p. 131.

poetry six years earlier,[13] and in 1891 his reputation was sufficient to garner the support of eminent journalists and writers, which facilitated his efforts in establishing literary societies in both Dublin and London.[14] Also, he considered distinctive Irish drama a possibility and was one initiator of the drive for a dramatic movement that resulted in the opening of the Abbey Theatre.[15] Initially promising, the societies were soon beset by political maneuvering and factionalism,[16] and the theatre was involved in several unsettling controversies. By Yeats's own account the societies were split between himself and Sir Charles Gavan Duffy.[17] Ronsley explains that one faction, lead by Duffy, was made up of older men who joined the Irish Literary Society (London) or the National Literary Society (Dublin) because they remembered the earlier Young Ireland movement. Yeats feared that if Duffy controlled the movement it would be enveloped by patriotism and politics of a moral nature and would become "commonplace,

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[13]John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (New York: The Noonday Press, 1964), n.p.

[14]A. G. Stock, W. B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), p. 69.

[15]Ibid. Critical opinion varies as to who, in conjunction with Yeats, began the movement, but most agree upon at least Lady Augusta Gregory, Edward Martyn, George Moore and John Synge.

[16]Ronsley, Yeats's Autobiography, p. 67.

[17]Yeats gives his account in "Ireland After Parnell," The Trembling of the Veil, in The Autobiography, pp. 133-155.

dogmatic, and shabby." He was convinced, Ronsley continues, that the most favorable means of establishing a significant Irish literature that would result in national unity lay in satire and criticism, not praise. Yeats's conviction was generally unpopular; many members opposed Duffy's politics and there were conflicts within each group.[18] According to Jeffares, the Irish Literary Theatre was replaced by the Irish National Dramatic Society (of which Yeats was presiding officer) in 1902, and the Abbey Theatre opened in 1904.[19] The theatre was a center of controversy for many years due to the plays of Yeats (Countess Cathleen) and Synge (Playboy of the Western World).[20] Finally, Ronsley says,

> Every area of Irish activity, whether intellectual, spiritual, artistic, or political, was separated from every other and internally divided. Ireland remained, notwithstanding . . . Yeats's work and the work of his . . . friends, a "bundle of fragments."[21]

The movement's failure was, of course, a disappointment to those who had channeled their energies into it. But it was fortunate for Yeats as an artist. As Ronsley notes, writing in his diary in 1909, Yeats recalls that he

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[18] Yeats's Autobiography, p. 68.

[19] A. Norman Jeffares, W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 137, 147. It was hoped that with the replacement more Irish actors would become involved.

[20] "Irish Renaissance," The Reader's Encyclopedia, 1965, I, 503.

[21] Yeats's Autobiography, p. 73.

realized that the "movement would have to give up the deliberate creation of a kind of Holy City in the imagination . . . or Holy Grail for the Irish mind, and saw that we must be content to express the individual."[22] As Boulger has pointed out, however, Yeats remained concerned with Irish identity to some extent for the remainder of his life;[23] his primary interests had become "Unity of Being," literature and philosophy.

While Yeats's "belief in nationality" was evolving towards "Unity of Being," related events were colaterally contributing to his development as a symbolist poet. As a child he was enchanted by the stories and fairy tales he first heard in the cottages around Ballisodare,[24] and he began to experience (so he thought at any rate) supernatural phenomena.[25] "I did not believe with my intellect," Yeats wrote, "but I believed with my emotions and the belief of the country people made that easy."[26] His interest in folk tales and the supernatural matured as he did and significantly affected his development as a symbolist, for it

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[22] Ibid., p. 163.

[23] James D. Boulger, "Yeats and Irish Identity," Thought, XLII (Summer, 1967), 188.

[24] Reveries, in The Autobiography, p. 9.

[25] Ronsley, Yeats's Autobiography, p. 45. Yeats records these events throughout Reveries, in The Autobiography.

[26] Reveries, in The Autobiography, p. 51.

led to his belief in one great memory and paved the way for his interest in the occult.

In 1901 Yeats wrote in "Magic":

> I believe in the practice and philosophy of what we have agreed to call magic, in what I must call the evocation of spirits, though I do not know what they are, in the power of creating magical illusions, in the visions of truth in the depths of the mind when the eyes are closed; and I believe in three doctrines, which have, as I think, been handed down from early times, and been the foundations of nearly all magical practices. These doctrines are:--
>
> [1]That the borders of our minds are ever shifting, and that many minds can flow into one another, as it were, and create or reveal a single mind, a single energy.
>
> [2]That the borders of our memories are as shifting, and that our memories are a part of one great memory, the memory of Nature herself.
>
> [3]That this great mind and great memory can be evoked by symbols.[27]

His belief in "this great mind and great memory" is carefully explained in "Magic." In 1889 or 1891, Yeats writes, he and an acquaintance were invited to a man's home "to witness a magical work." The evoker of spirits chanted and, Yeats continues, "almost at once my imagination began to move of itself and to bring before me vivid images that . . . had . . . a motion of their own, a life I could not change or shape."[28] They witnessed several visions together and Yeats reacted with mixed emotions. The visions, he

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[27]"Magic," from Ideas of Good and Evil, in Essays and Introductions, Collier Books (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 28.

[28]Ibid., pp. 28-29.

assumed, because they were not made by him, the evoker of spirits, or his wife, must have arisen in their three minds. Still, he thought of them as little more "than a proof of the supremacy of imagination, of the power of many minds to become one, overpowering one another by spoken words and by unspoken thought till they have become a single, intense, unhesitating energy."[29] Following events gave him reason to reconsider. He saw a young woman (who he assumes was totally unaware of the finer aspects of symbolism) who, when cast into a trance, saw the Tree of Life. Returning home, Yeats found a passage in The Book of Concealed Mystery describing the Tree of Good and Evil, which, he says, he had not at that time read.[30] Again, he saw a young man cast into a similar trance envision the symbolic tree surrounded by a walled garden atop a mountain. "Some years afterwards," Yeats writes, "I found a mediaeval diagram, which pictured Eden as a walled garden upon a high mountain." The answer, he decided, was that there is a memory of Nature that reveals symbols and events from the past. His premise was reinforced by his knowledge that he was not alone in his belief:

> Mystics of many countries and many centuries have spoken of this memory; and the honest men and charlatans, who keep the magical traditions which

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[29] Ibid., pp. 35-36.

[30] The book is Jewish and was translated by MacGregor Mathers in The Kabbalah Unveiled, Yeats notes, ibid., p. 45.

> will some day be studied as a part of folk-lore, base most that is of importance in their claims upon this memory. I have read of it in Paracelsus and in some Indian book that describes the people of past days as still living within it, "thinking the thought and doing the deed." And I have found it in the "Prophetic Books" of William Blake, who calls its images "the bright sculptures of Los's Hall"; and says that all events, "all love stories," renew themselves from those images.[31]

Although it was long before Yeats admitted the power of symbols, his personal discovery of the great memory eventually led to a conviction important in the structural progress of his symbolist position: he came to consider symbols, Rajan notes, "the greatest of all powers," capable of evoking Nature's memory itself.[32]

In 1888 Yeats had become a member of the Blavatsky Lodge of the Theosophical Society.[33] Impressed at first with Madame Helena Blavatsky, Yeats soon tired of her dogmatism, and there was friction between the two. Then, Ronsley notes, in 1890 he was asked to resign from the lodge for conducting experiments with symbols.[34] He did so and, Rajan says, promptly joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.[35] According to Seiden, whereas Oriental mysticism was the principal interest of the Blavatsky

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[31] Ideas of Good and Evil, pp. 44-47.

[32] Ibid., p. 49.

[33] Balachandra Rajan, W. B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1965), p. 28.

[34] Ronsley, Yeats's Autobiography, pp. 63, 65.

[35] Rajan, W. B. Yeats: A Critical Introduction, p. 28.

Lodge, members of the Golden Dawn were primarily interested in magic and ritual.[36] Yeats's association with these (and other) groups not only provided him with images and symbols for his poetry but also had a profound influence upon his philosophy.[37]

Yeats's realization that unity of culture was impossible and his familiarity with the occult supposition that man's primary task is self-realization ("To know thyself is to be everything")[38] formed the basis of his quest for "Unity of Being." Essentially, Ronsley says, this meant to him the fusion of intellect and emotion.[39] An exclusively intellectual philosophy is undesirable, he reasoned, for such a philosophy results in a rational, fragmented perspective; intellect reinforced by emotion, however, could involve the entire personality and result in total understanding.[40] Stock says that in personal terms, "Unity of Being" is a momentary self-realization of the soul; it is

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[36]Morton Irving Seiden, William Butler Yeats: The Poet as a Mythmaker (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1962), p. 41.

[37]This is not to imply that the occult was the sole source contributing to Yeats's thought. T. R. Henn cites many of the influences in the introduction to the first edition of The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats (London: Methuen and Company, 1965), pp. xii-xiii.

[38]John Senior, The Way Down and Out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature (New York: The Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 39.

[39]Ronsley, Yeats's Autobiography, pp. 5-6.

[40]Ibid., pp. 8-9.

a moment of beauty, a moment when the soul is everything it desires to be.[41] Yeats writes in "Ireland After Parnell" that "Unity of Being" is not attainable for all, then explains in "The Stirring of the Bones" that unity of being might be found by some men "emotionally, instinctively, by the rejection of all experience not of the right quality, and by the limitation of its quantity."[42] The importance of this concept must not be underestimated, for nothing mattered so much to Yeats as an artist or as a man. In A General Introduction for My Work, published in 1937, he wrote: "I was born into this faith, have lived in it, and shall die in it; my Christ . . . is that Unity of Being Dante compared to a perfectly proportioned human body, Blake's 'Imagination,' what the Upanishads have named 'Self': . . . ."[43]

Senior points out that occultists believe that certain supermen, called "bodhisattvas," attain self-realization and, because they wish to relate higher truths to those who are incapable of understanding them, the bodhisattvas use symbols, thus affecting the unconscious levels of less-developed minds.[44] Although by no means a self-styled

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[41]Stock, W. B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought, pp. 123-24.

[42]The Trembling of the Veil, in The Autobiography, pp. 166, 235.

[43]A General Introduction for My Work, in Essays and Introductions, p. 518.

[44]Senior, The Way Down and Out, p. 40.

bodhissattva, Yeats was certainly aware of this concept and its premise that symbols may be effective even when not understood on a conscious level. So the relationship between Yeats's art and occultism is, as Senior points out, obvious: "the great memory is the mother of the muses" and symbols provide the means to that memory.[45] Only symbols are capable of expressing the divine essence, Yeats writes;[46] thus, they are "the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half consciously by their successors, the poet, the musician and the artist." They act, he adds, "because the Great Memory associates them with certain events and moods and persons."[47] In essence, then, what the symbol does is expand one's consciousness by calling forth the feeling of something forgotten, thus creating the possibility of significant recall.[48]

Yeats's concept of the imagination must be considered here. In "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry" he writes:

> I have observed dreams and visions very carefully, and am now certain that the imagination has some way of lighting on the truth that the reason has not, and that its commandments, delivered when

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[45] Ibid., p. 158.

[46] "William Blake and His Illustrations to the Divine Comedy," in Ideas of Good and Evil, in Essays and Introductions, p. 116.

[47] "Magic," in Ideas of Good and Evil, in Essays and Introductions, pp. 49, 50.

[48] Senior, The Way Down and Out, p. 43.

> the body is still and the reason silent, are the most binding we can ever know.[49]

William Blake affected Yeats's philosophy of the imagination and reality considerably. Blake, as Yeats points out in "William Blake and the Imagination," believed imagination "the first emanation of divinity." Therefore, Yeats remarks of Blake,

> The reason, and by the reason he meant deductions from the observations of the senses, binds us to mortality because it binds us to the senses, and divides us from each other by showing us our clashing interests; but imagination divides us from mortality by the immortality of beauty, and binds us to each other by opening the secret doors of all hearts.

Yeats's familiarity with Blake's art and Blake's emphasis upon the imagination--which, as Yeats points out, Blake learned from Jacob Boehme and alchemist writers[50]--influenced Yeats but was tempered by the occult assumption that "things above are as they are below"; or, as Senior explains, mind and matter are one, imagination and reality are synonymous.[51] Yeats's concept of the nature of symbols reflects his synthesis of both modes of thought. Symbols are of two kinds, he writes in "The Symbolism of Poetry": emotional and intellectual. Whereas the former evokes only emotion, the latter evokes intellect mingled with emotions. The intellectual symbol is, as a result, more nearly efficacious, for ideally it consists of emotion tempered by reason and

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[49] Ideas of Good and Evil, in Essays and Introductions, p. 65.

[50] Ibid., p. 112.

[51] The Way Down and Out, p. 39.

may therefore more nearly achieve unity. Yeats continues and defends the necessity of the intellectual symbol:

> It is the intellect that decides where the reader shall ponder over the procession of the symbols, and if the symbols are merely emotional, he gazes from amid the accidents and destinies of the world; but if the symbols are intellectual too, he becomes himself a part of pure intellect, and he is himself mingled with the procession.[52]

Intellectual symbols, then, containing both emotion and intellect, may represent "Unity of Being," but only because of the imagination. However, just as one symbol may denote both emotion and intellect, two symbols--one suggesting emotion, the other intellect--may complement one another and symbolize "Unity of Being." Yeats employs this method in his later verse to suggest the perfect unity that physical union symbolizes.

As Henn points out, the idea that physical union symbolizes the reconciliation of all opposites in the divine world stems from traditional Kabbalistic and Hindu mythology.[53] Senior elaborates, explaining that sexual union as perfect union may be traced to occult dogma which states that the universe is comprised of paired opposites, male and female, light and dark, etc., which generate their own harmony. Because the human body is considered the image of creation

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[52] _Ideas of Good and Evil_, in _Essays and Introductions_, pp. 160-61.

[53] _The Lonely Tower_, p. 103.

(the universe is viewed as a living man) and man is created by sexual union, that union is divine. The original source separates "into male and female parts," Senior says, "and, by cohabiting with itself, creates." Furthermore, Senior adds, during physical union, man realizes his female nature and becomes, symbolically, whole.[54] Yeats was, of course, familiar with this view and, as Melchiori has stated, in Yeats's mature poetry "Unity of Being" is often symbolized by physical union.[55]

Yeats believed subjective artists escape "the barenness and shallowness of a too conscious arrangement" by using ancient symbols, for such symbols evoke multiple meanings in the depths of nature (the unconscious).[56] He chose the archetypal rose and stone as complementary symbols to represent perfect sexual reconciliation--perfect unity--in his later poetry. The rose, as a symbol of female regeneration,[57] and the stone, as a symbol of male regeneration,[58] were splendid choices. This is not their sole function, however; the rose was a symbol of many things of primary

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[54] The Way Down and Out, p. 39.

[55] Giorgio Melchiori, "The Moment of Moments," in Yeats: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by John Unterecker (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 35.

[56] "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," in Ideas of Good and Evil, in Essays and Introductions, p. 87.

[57] Barbara Seward, The Symbolic Rose (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 6.

[58] M. R. P. McGuire, "Stones, Sacred," New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, XIII, 725.

importance in Yeats's early verse, and the significance of the stone increased as he wrote. They were not joined to represent perfect unity until the later verse; to that point, each, particularly the rose, served separate functions on various levels. Together, they are two of the most important symbols Yeats employed in his attempt to write poetry ". . . as cold/ And passionate as the dawn."[59]

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[59]This passage is in one of Yeats's important stone poems, "The Fisherman." All poems cited are from The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats (New York: Macmillan Company, 1970).

## CHAPTER II

## THE ROSE AND THE STONE AS SYMBOLS

The rose's circular shape and multitude of colors have fascinated man since he first began to consider and question his origin and his surroundings. Miss Seward discusses the development of the archetypal rose in her excellent work The Symbolic Rose. First and foremost, she begins, the rose is associated with love and woman. However, its meaning is not restricted to those two areas: it may also be used to symbolize, among other things, temporality, pain and death. The flower's original association with woman led to its subsequent association with motherhood and Mother Nature and, Miss Seward points out, from there it was a short step to its association with the mother country, specifically England and Ireland. The rose was also aligned with birth and rebirth.[1] In one of man's earliest attempts to understand the world around him, Miss Seward writes, he employed the rose (or any similarly shaped blossom) to suggest the physical union of the male and female, "the physical fertility of all natural things, and the spiritual attainment of ultimate harmony"; in other words, the generative process and its

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[1]Barbara Seward, The Symbolic Rose (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 6-7.

resulting harmony--or unity--in general. In ancient Egypt, Miss Seward continues, the rose of Isis was employed to symbolize similar concepts and Isis herself became the personification of universal nature; "her flower represented the female generative principle in the world at large." Eventually, the flower acquired various shades of meaning and came to symbolize the emotion of love. During the early development of Christianity, not only Isis but Aphrodite (or Venus) as well was associated with the rose. As Miss Seward points out, the Greek goddess's association with the flower is especially important, for Aphrodite was primarily the goddess of mortal, not spiritual, love; that is, she was the primitive earth-mother.[2] Thus, the symbolic rose took on new meaning. Also, Miss Seward explains, the rose "acquired an immortal counterpart blossoming in the realm of ideals"[3] in its earliest stages, ironically, because the flower's one flaw is that it withers and dies quickly. It was at about this time that the rose began to symbolize love and beauty in general. During the Middle Ages, Christian love rather than pagan love increased in importance, and the earlier meanings of the rose were threatened with obscurity. The rose was too important and popular to be totally ignored by the Catholic church, however; instead, the church decided to adopt the flower as

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[2] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[3] Ibid., p. 15.

its own. The rose's meaning had to be altered somewhat, of course, for it was regarded as a symbol of pagan sensuality; subsequently, many of its original meanings were changed altogether or substantially modified to complement Catholic dogma. Thus, Miss Seward writes, it became the Catholic symbol of Christ's spiritual love and gradually acquired meanings involving the view of love as "a manifestation of God in the world."[4] Also, it eventually became the dominant flower of the Garden of Eden, it represented Christ's crucifixion, and it symbolized the joy of immortality resulting from His death. Most important, however, it became the symbol of the Virgin Mary, and spiritual love replaced the flower's former association with Aphrodite and earthly love. The rose was not actually associated with the Virgin until the twelfth century perhaps because, Miss Seward suggests, the Virgin was not revered so highly until that time. At any rate, the rose was not confined to any one of its meanings; in a mediaeval allegory, it might represent Mary, Christ, Paradise, martyrdom or any combination of these.[5] While the rose was becoming Mary's symbol, Miss Seward continues, the concept of courtly love was gathering its followers, and poets naturally chose the rose to symbolize

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[4] Ibid., p. 18.

[5] Seward interjects an interesting, however tentative, premise here. She writes: "the symbol in Western literature appears to have evolved from religious allegory. One might almost maintain that in our society the symbolic method in general can claim specific origin in the allegorical rose," ibid., pp. 20-22.

their beloved.[6] So, as a symbol of sexuality, the rose was not completely subsumed, as its takeover by the church had threatened. Still, it did not symbolize sexuality on a base level for, Miss Seward writes, the love that poets wrote of embraced "the highest conceptions of beauty, goodness" and joy.[7] Ultimately, the flower came to symbolize both earthly and spiritual love in Dante's Divine Comedy.[8]

Continuing, Miss Seward points out that whereas Dante perfected "a symbolic method that relies on tradition for the validity of its matter and manner . . . the writers who followed him often lacked a stable, external orientation and so tended to rely on private perception or belief in organizing experience." From this subjectivity, symbolism of a different kind developed. During the Renaissance, Miss Seward writes, the rose as a symbol was the exception rather than the rule; moreover, when it was used, it was employed to express subjective attitudes rather than objective ones (as had been evidenced in Dante's work). "And," Miss Seward notes, "it is to the subjectivity of simple Renaissance metaphors that nineteenth- and twentieth-century symbols can trace their origins." The symbolist movement began in

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[6] Ibid., pp. 28-29.

[7] Ibid., p. 31.

[8] Until that time, Seward notes, no writer had tried to express the rose's numerous meanings in a single symbolic rose. Ibid., p. 37.

the nineteenth century and stemmed from the idealistic romanticism of the Renaissance. As the importance of the church declined, Miss Seward explains, there was increasingly more emphasis on earthly things as well as an interest in nature's beauty for its own sake. For the most part, the rose retained its role as a metaphor of love that had been established in the Middle Ages, but at the same time it was becoming more sensual, reaching its heights with the Cavalier poets; in their poetry, Miss Seward explains, the rose was closely related to seduction and sexual love. The rose was, however, also admired in some poetry simply for itself. Although it was chiefly aligned with love, poetry, natural beauty and, in some cases, wine, it was also aligned with decay and the inevitability of death. In the latter sense, Miss Seward writes, "religious poets . . . often evoked the temporal flower to express the vanity of temporal joys."[9]

During the eighteenth century, symbolic roses--as well as symbolic technique in general--played a smaller role. However, Miss Seward continues, "side by side with eighteenth-century rationalism persisted a minor literary stream maintaining the importance of emotion and imaginative creation." At the end of the century, the romantic reaction against neoclassicism came to a head, and romantic poets began to stress their individuality, their subjectivity.

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[9]Ibid., pp. 53-55, 57-58.

Nature, of course, received much emphasis, and the rose was, as a result, revived, although primarily in the metaphorical rather than in the symbolical sense.[10] It was used both traditionally and--once again--for its own sake. Also, because science had encroached upon the church, Miss Seward notes, "some poets searched the beauties of nature for a faith that they could reconcile with current knowledge. The rose . . . came more and more to be the focus of unorthodox transcendental longings." Eventually, the flower took on personal meanings, and emotional responses to it became "intricate responses to natural or supernatural realms in which that rose was only incidentally a flower." Briefly discussing one romantic artist, William Blake, Miss Seward observes that he employed the flower in "The Sick Rose" to suggest sexuality. And Blake, she sums up, constructed

> for the first time in English literature an intricate symbolic system in which a rose could become the expression of a personal mysticism . . . for Blake . . . turned his back on all established tradition and fashioned of his private perceptions an elaborate semireligious outlook expressed through a private symbolic mythology.[11]

According to Miss Seward, the writers of the Symbolist movement in France significantly affected the rose's development. They were not, however, impressed with the rose at the outset, Miss Seward says, because of its long

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[10] Ibid., p. 61.

[11] Ibid., pp. 63-64.

association with earthly beauty and traditional Christian concepts. Also, as Wilson has pointed out, the Symbolists did not employ archetypal symbols but chose symbols arbitrarily to represent their individual ideas.[12] The Symbolists, who were searching for a "personally satisfying ideal," Miss Seward writes, eventually grew "weary and decadent."[13] In their decline, however, the rose flourished, for they were forced to seek new areas of strength. For some the Catholic church became a refuge of sorts, and the rose was resurrected. In a short discussion of the rose of Symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé, Miss Seward notes that it became "a symbol of conflicting attitudes towards the sensual and of his artistic inability to transform actuality into the ideality of his dreams." In his poems, she continues, the rose symbolized, among other things, sensual love and its relationship to earthly, temporal things and the impossibility of achieving perfect, spiritual love in the physical world.[14] As the church became a refuge for some, she continues, the occult became a refuge for others and cults became more and more popular. The Order of the Rosicrucians was most favored in Paris. And the primary symbol of their rituals, that of the rose superimposed on a cross, was to

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[12]Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), p. 20.

[13]The Symbolic Rose, p. 72.

[14]Ibid., p. 69.

have a profound effect upon numerous future writers, including Yeats.[15]

While the swing from symbolism to despair and the occult in what Miss Seward calls "the decadent fin de siècle" was being echoed throughout Europe, English writers were getting acquainted with the symbolist concepts of the French. While the French were struggling along, English artists--William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, for example--had been promoting the esthetic movement in their own country. Morris, Miss Seward writes, employed the flower to evoke associations with courtly love, while Rossetti employed it solely to heighten his effectiveness. "Unlike the French," Miss Seward writes, English writers "found in beauty their sufficient religion and in the esthetic experience their sufficient goal," and art was, in effect, worshiped for itself. Hence, symbols like the rose were employed solely for the beauty they afforded a work. So, for a time beauty and melancholy were paired and there was a new interest in personal suffering, but the English esthetic movement lasted for a relatively short time, and English artists turned to France. According to Miss Seward, because French concepts were not fully comprehended and because of England's very nature, the symbolist movement took a different direction in England. In essence, the English overemphasized the morbidity of the French and found the rose, Miss Seward

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[15] Ibid., pp. 76-78.

speculates, an especially valuable symbol in expressing this morbidness.[16] Poets writing in the final decade of the nineteenth century modified the trend somewhat, she adds, but only Oscar Wilde succeeded in giving the rose the symbolic quality that the French had given it.[17]

It is more difficult to trace the development of the archetypal stone and its evolution as a literary symbol, for there is little, if any, scholarly work that focuses upon the symbolic stone; there is, it seems, no work comparable to Miss Seward's. "The stone," according to Cirlot, "is a symbol of being, of cohesion and harmonious reconciliation with self," for its "hardness and durability" suggested to early man

> the antithesis of biological things subject to the laws of change, decay and death, as well as the antithesis to dust, sand and stone splinters, as aspects of disintegration. The stone when whole symbolized unity and strength; when shattered it signified dismemberment, psychic disintegration, infirmity, death and annihilation.

To primitive man, Cirlot continues, the stones that fell from heaven explained the origin of life.[18] The "mysterious stone" (Schethlyâ) that Waite cites is just one of the explanations man perpetrated. According to myth, Waite explains, the stone was originally a part of God's throne; God cast it into the abyss to form the world and it became the world's

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[16] Ibid., pp. 80-82.

[17] Ibid., p. 84.

[18] J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. by Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 299.

cornerstone.[19] Furthermore, when volcanoes erupted, Cirlot writes, man imagined that air became fire, fire became water and water became stone; "hence stone constitutes the first solid form of the creative rhythm." "The mythic and religious significance is only one step removed from this basic symbolic sense," he continues, and points out that that step "was taken by the immense majority of peoples during the animistic era." For example, he writes, meteorites were worshipped. Many legends also involve stones, Cirlot says; "the so-called Abadir which Saturn devoured, mistaking it for Jupiter; or the stones of Deucalion and Pyrrha; or those in the myth of Medusa the Gorgon; or that which contained Mithras until his birth." The stones of folktales have less profound powers, he writes--for example, the Roman Lapis lineus which was purported to prophesy with a mere color change, and the Irish stone Lia-Fail, associated with coronations. Most important to this study is the alchemic philosopher's stone, which, Cirlot says, "represents the 'conjunction' of opposites, or the integration of the unconscious self with the feminine or unconscious side . . . ; it is, then, a symbol of the All."[20]

In another study, Bayley points out that "the idea of oneness is . . . retained in our English word stone" and observes that "stones and rocks have been worshipped as

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[19]Arthur Waite, The Holy Kabbalah (New York: University Books, 1965), p. 228.

[20]A Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 299-300.

symbols of the Deity" in "all ages and among all nations." "The Infinite and Perfect One was often represented by a stone globe," he writes; furthermore,

> The GREEKS symbolized MERCURY, APOLLO, NEPTUNE, and HERCULES under the form of a square stone; VENUS was worshipped by the Paphians as a white pyramid; BACCHUS by the Thebans as a pillar; WOTAN by the Scandanavians as a cube; and SOMMONACODUM by the SIAMESE as a black pyramid.

As examples of the Christian God, Bayley offers Moses' complaint to the Israelites, "Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful," the Psalmist's promise that "Unto thee will I cry O Lord my Rock," and the contemporary hymn that Christians sing, "Rock of Ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee." Bayley points out also that even today small, white pebbles, called "Godstones," are often placed on Irish graves.[21] These stones, McGuire adds, were believed to give peace and protect the soul of the dead.[22] Tylor conjectures that since in India stones are set up representing deities, cromlechs--monuments of stones enclosing a mound--may have had a similar significance.[23]

Yeats, a symbolist in the modern tradition, believed that artists must employ ancient symbols because of the multiple meanings such symbols evoke and because of their

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[21]Harold Bayley, The Lost Language of Symbolism: An Inquiry into the Origin of Certain Letters, Words, Names, Fairy-Tales, Folklore, and Mythologies (London: Williams and Norgate, 1951), pp. 174-181.

[22]"Stones, Sacred," p. 725.

[23]"Stone Worship," Encyclopedia Americana, 1970, XXV, 687.

relationship with the Great Memory. Since both the archetypal rose and stone are capable of functioning on various levels and eliciting a multitude of meanings, each may take its respective place as a major symbol in his work. And, as Miss Seward points out in a discussion of Yeats as a symbolist, "in his rose, symbolic flower of his early, overly subjective writing, it is possible to see the causes and initial stages of Yeats's progress--and of art's--from decadence to power."[24]

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[24] The Symbolic Rose, p. 88.

## CHAPTER III

## THE ROSE OF THE COUNTESS KATHLEEN AND VARIOUS LEGENDS AND LYRICS AND THE WIND AMONG THE REEDS

Yeats was a romantic, and the symbolism of his early verse reflects the subjectivity of the romantic artist. As he was familiar with the rose's traditional meanings and was well aware of the important role it played in the works of artists preceding him, it was only natural that he chose the queen of subjective symbols to reign over his early verse, for the rose suggested--as no other symbol could--all that he felt during that period of his life. But as Yeats matured, he became increasingly objective (or at least he assumed the objective mask) and the symbols he employs in the later verse reflect that objectivity. Although the rose does not entirely disappear from his poetry, its frequency gradually decreases as objective symbols become more and more important; when the rose does occur in the later poems, it often works in conjunction with objective symbols. Sexuality in general and the perfect unity symbolized by the physical union of male and female is the theme of several of the later poems, and in some of them that unity is suggested by the presence of the subjective rose and the objective stone.

As previously noted, Yeats believed that to be effective a symbol must be traditional, unified and intellectual,

capable of evoking ideas mingled with emotions. Knowing the rose's rich archetypal heritage and its value to writers preceding him, Yeats could choose no better symbol to represent the things dearest to his heart during his early manhood. On a personal level, these include Maud Gonne and Ireland. On a higher plane the rose, symbolic of sensuous, divine woman, expresses his concept of unity. But due to his interest in occult and numerous other philosophies, and because his poems are most often written on both personal and cosmic levels, the rose does not function on a single, obvious plane; instead, it simultaneously expresses some of the ideas that Yeats, as a young, subjective poet, was becoming continuously aware of and interested in. As Seiden suggests, the rose "stood for and was a beautiful woman, ideal love, the alkahest, the poetic imagination, Ireland as a reborn goddess of the spring, the resolved antinomies, politics as an occult passion, and the spirit of beauty in nature."[1] Furthermore, because the flower contains elements of each, it symbolizes the union of the spiritual and temporal worlds.

The rose was apparently a relatively unimportant symbol in Yeats's earliest poetry, but his interest in it steadily increased--due perhaps to his growing fondness for Maud Gonne, whom he met in 1889, and, as Miss Seward

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[1]Morton Irving Seiden, William Butler Yeats: The Poet as a Mythmaker (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1962), pp. 153-54.

suggests, his participation in Rosicrucian rituals[2]--for the rose abounds in his second book of poems, first published in 1892, titled The Countess Kathleen and Various Legends and Lyrics.

As Jeffares points out, Yeats's notes do not make the symbolism of the rose poems explicit. In the first edition, Jeffares notes, Yeats explains:

> The rose is a favourite symbol with the Irish poets. It has given a name to more than one poem, both Gaelic and English, and is used, not merely in love poems, but in poems addressed to Ireland, as in De Vere's line 'The little black rose shall be red at last' and in Mangan's 'Dark Rosaleen.' I do not, of course, use it in this sense.

In a note dated 1925, Jeffares adds, Yeats is only slightly more explicit:

> I notice upon reading these poems for the first time for several years that the quality symbolized as The Rose differs from Intellectual Beauty of Shelley and of Spenser in that I have imagined it as suffering with man and not as something pursued and seen from far.[3]

Yet another explanation is offered by Yeats in The Autobiography:

> I had an unshakable conviction, arising how or whence I cannot tell, that invisible gates would open as they opened for Blake, as they opened for Swedenborg, as they opened for Boehme, and that this philosophy would find its manuals of devotion in all imaginative literature, and set before Irishmen for special manual an Irish literature which, though made by many minds, would seem the work of a single mind, and turn our places

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[2]Barbara Seward, The Symbolic Rose (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 100-101.

[3]A. Norman Jeffares, W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), p. 74.

> of beauty or legendary association into holy symbols. I did not think this philosophy would be altogether pagan, for it was plain that its symbols must be selected from all those things that had moved men most during many, mainly Christian, centuries.
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> I thought that for a time I could rhyme of love, calling it The Rose, because of the Rose's double meaning; of a fisherman who had "never a crack" in his heart; of an old woman complaining of the idleness of the young, or of some cheerful fiddler, all those things that "popular poets" write of, but that I must some day--on that day when the gates began to open--become difficult or obscure. With a rhythm that still echoed Morris I prayed to the Red Rose, to Intellectual Beauty.[4]

The lines following Yeats's somewhat enigmatic comments are from "To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time," the poem that prefaces the rose poems of The Countess Kathleen. Nowhere, then, does Yeats state the specific meaning (or variety of meanings) of the rose in his poetry. Yeatsian scholars, however, agree for the most part upon the rose's symbolic role; Unterecker sums up their opinion in his observation that the rose is eternal beauty as well as a combination of beauty and peace, beauty and wisdom, Shelley's Intellectual Beauty, man's suffering, physical love, Ireland, and religion.[5]

The rose functions on several of these levels in "To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time." The poem is Yeats's acknowledgement of his future obscurity and his desire to

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[4]"Hodos Chameliontos," The Trembling of the Veil, in William Butler Yeats, The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats, Collier Books (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), pp. 169-70.

[5]John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (New York: The Noonday Press, 1964), pp. 75-76.

record Ireland's myths and communicate to some extent with Ireland's people until that inevitable time when his poetry will be fully comprehended by only the few. The rose that Yeats implores in the first line of the poem is red, proud and sad. "Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!/ Come near me, while I sing the ancient ways," he pleads. In the final lines of the first stanza, he continues:

> Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,
> I find under the boughs of love and hate,
> In all poor foolish things that live a day,
> Eternal beauty wandering on her way.

While the three-fold rose is, as Unterecker suggests, symbolic of the personal, the occult and Ireland,[6] it is also the initial expression of a theme that recurs in many of the poems of this section of the Collected Poems; that is, Yeats's fascination with the eternal, the spiritual. But this does not indicate, as Miss Seward suggests, that Yeats harbors a death wish;[7] on the contrary, Yeats yearns for the cosmic unity that will result from the union of the above and the below and, on another level, for the personal "Unity of Being" that will result if he can but unite his subjective and objective self. His interest in cosmic union is explicit in lines eleven and twelve, in which Yeats says he does not wish to be so concerned with "poor foolish," temporal matters but prefers instead to seek "Eternal beauty." Still, he writes in the following stanza,

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[6] Ibid., p. 75.

[7] The Symbolic Rose, p. 89.

he does not wish to be severed from "common things" entirely at this time to ". . . seek alone to hear the strange things said/ By God to the bright hearts of those long dead." Although he will eventually become esoteric, he wishes first to "sing of old Eire and the ancient ways:/ Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days." The symbolism of the rose of these concluding lines is representative of Ireland's passion, her pride and her chronically unhappy condition.

As Miss Raine points out, Yeats had been a Platonist long before reading Plato in 1927 for, she explains, the transmission of Platonic thought is not passed on solely by Platonists but also by Hermetic, Cabalistic and Christian philosophers.[8] Thus, in his studies of Plato, Yeats was simply perfecting the knowledge that had come to him in other forms; and, as Miss Raine notes, his reading was "colored by his own preoccupations--with poetic anamnesis, and with the nature and history of the soul."[9] And he emphatically refused Plato's denial of the merit of the lower world and the soul's experience in the mortal phase. He wrote in 1937, Miss Raine says, that "Unity of Being" is not "distant and therefore intellectually understandable, but immanent, differing from man to man and age to age, taking upon itself pain and ugliness, 'eye of newt and

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[8]Kathleen Raine, "Yeats and Platonism," Texas Quarterly, IV (Winter, 1967), 161.

[9]Ibid., p. 170.

toe of frog.'" He was following, Miss Raine points out, the Hermetic and alchemic tradition which teaches, as previously mentioned, that "that which is above is like that which is beneath, and that which is beneath is like that which is above, to make the unity of one thing."[10] Yeats expresses this concept in several of the rose poems in which he equates non-religious, sensuous woman with divine woman, personified as the mother of God. As Eliade points out in a discussion of "Woman, Earth and Fecundity," the sacredness of woman, who "is mystically held to be one with earth," depends upon the earth's holiness.[11] By adding the female principle to the symbolic rose and placing the female at the heart of the divine genetrix, Yeats attains a cosmic sensuousness. This is most prominent in four of the rose poems: "The Rose of the World," "The Rose of Peace," "The Sorrow of Love," and "To Ireland in the Coming Times." In "The Rose of the World," Yeats asks, "Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?" In this one question Yeats expresses the idea that absolute beauty is not ephemeral, nor is it tucked away in a higher realm. The power and effect of physical woman is, in fact, everlasting: for her lips, he writes, "Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,/ And Usna's children died." Yeats is seeing

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[10] Ibid., p. 178.

[11] Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, trans. by Willard R. Trask, Harvest Books (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959), p. 144.

Maud Gonne as a parallel to Helen of Troy. And though "We and the labouring world are passing by," are temporal, Yeats writes, everything lives reflected on the lonely, immortal countenance of the woman he celebrates. In the concluding stanza, Yeats writes:

> Bow down, archangels, in your dim abode:
> Before you were, or any hearts to beat,
> Weary and kind one lingered by His seat;
> He made the world to be a grassy road
> Before her wandering feet.

Here, Yeats literally says that the female form (or the Platonic ideal) was in God's mind before any other creation took place. The following lines are especially significant, for in saying that God so loved woman that he created the world for her, Yeats implies that God condones sensuality. This implication is heightened by the sensuous imagery of the closing lines. The image of earthly woman dominates the first two stanzas of this poem while the image of divine woman dominates the third stanza; in it Yeats successfully combines elements of temporal (sensuous) woman and spiritual (divine) woman in one symbol, the rose; this woman is the ultimate force--she is, as the title indicates, the rose of the world which was created in her honor.

Yeats continues his sensuous metaphysics in "The Rose of Peace." Though Unterecker writes that this poem is one of those that focuses on the lucky state of the pure in heart who are wrapped in illusion,"[12] it is more likely that

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[12] Reader's Guide, p. 80.

Yeats is considering the peace that would result from the union of the above and the below, the spiritual and the temporal. The rose of peace that joins the two is the cosmic beauty symbolized by Maud Gonne. The ultimate union of the two worlds is described in the first stanza:

> If Michael, leader of God's host
> When Heaven and Hell are met,
> Looked down on you from Heaven's door-post
> He would his deeds forget.

Furthermore, Yeats continues in the second stanza, Michael would no longer brood upon "God's wars" but would instead spend his time weaving a chaplet out of the stars for her head. "Led on by gentle ways," then, folk "Would come at last to God's great town"; unity would finally be attained because of her. And, Yeats concludes:

> . . . God would bid His warfare cease,
> Saying all things were well;
> And softly make a rosy peace,
> A peace of Heaven with Hell.

Yeats could not be any more explicit: eternal beauty and sensuous woman are one. She is the rose of peace and can, because she embodies both holiness and sensuality, finally unite the above and the below.

At first glance "The Sorrow of Love" seems exceptionally esoteric. Unterecker, noting that it concerns order and disorder, points out that the first and third stanzas are identical, with merely a shift in emphasis; he then leaves the reader to consider Yeats's meaning.[13] Jeffares notes

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[13] Reader's Guide, pp. 80-81.

that the poem was written to Maud.[14] In light of these comments, the poem's meaning is more clear. Again, there are many levels. At one time, Yeats writes in the opening stanza, order "Had blotted out man's imagery and his cry." Presumably, Yeats refers to himself; his life was previously relatively orderly and he was happy. Then,

> A girl arose that had red mournful lips
> And seemed the greatness of the world in tears,
> Doomed like Odysseus and the labouring ships
> And proud as Priam murdered with his peers.

On a personal level, Yeats writes of a particular woman, Maud, while on another he again expresses his concept of cosmic woman. The meaning of Yeats's metaphor is obvious: in this girl is contained all of the physical and spiritual elements of the rose and woman. Her sensuousness, her suffering, her divinity and her pride are all expressed in these four lines as they are in "The Rose of the World"; in fact, the imagery of this poem purposefully repeats that of the earlier one. Her lips are red and mournful. She is the "greatness of the world," doomed like Odysseus, and proud like Priam. And, as in both "The Rose of the World" and "The Rose of Peace," she has a lasting effect. For, Yeats writes in the concluding stanza, she arose (that is, Maud entered his life) and the resulting disorder "Could but compose man's image and his cry."

"The Rose of Battle" is more obscure than "The Rose of Peace." It may not be assumed that if the rose of peace

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[14] Man and Poet, p. 76.

symbolizes harmony, the rose of battle symbolizes discord, for it has been established that the rose calls men from strife; rather, Yeats is writing of the discord of the physical world and man's longing for the harmony and unity of the spiritual realm. "Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the world!/ The tall thought-woven sails, that flap unfurled/ Above the tide of hours, trouble the air," Yeats writes. A band of men gather, and as they pass slowly by, he begins to speak:

> Turn if you may from battles never done,
> I call, as they go by me one by one,
> Danger no refuge holds, and war no peace,
> For him who hears love sing and never cease,
> Beside her clean-swept hearth, her quiet shade:
> But gather all for whom no love hath made
> A woven silence, or but come to cast
> A song into the air, and singing passed
> To smile on the pale dawn; and gather you
> Who have sought more than is in rain or dew.

These, Yeats continues, are "The sad, the lonely, the insatiable" who seek unity. Although, as Seiden points out, the bell-sound of Yeats's poems usually indicates the temporal world,[15] Yeats is also writing of the spiritual realm. The next two lines, "God's bell has claimed them by the little cry/ Of their sad hearts, that may not live nor die," indicate that these men, previously neither alive nor dead, have been claimed by God at last and will now enter the divine realm. The "Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the world," Yeats continues, has also heard the ring of "The bell that calls us on; the sweet far thing," and,

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[15] The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 177.

because it has ". . . gorwn sad with its eternity," it has become like the men. They wait, Yeats says, and when they are finally ". . . defeated in His wars" (or when they escape temporality), they ". . . shall no longer hear the little cry/ Of our sad hearts, that may not live nor die."[16] They will have finally attained ultimate "Unity of Being." Unterecker's assertion that this poem reflects the discordant nature of reality[17] supports the premise that in "The Rose of Battle" Yeats is writing of the discord of the physical world and the need for the peaceful, unified, spiritual realm. In addition, as Seiden suggests, Yeats may be speaking of reincarnated souls who are finally reborn in the spiritual realm.[18]

According to Jeffares, Yeats asked Maud to marry him for the first time in 1891 and, Jeffares explains, when she refused, insisting they could be no more than dear friends, the pair went for a stroll. As they walked, Maud noticed a flock of birds flying overhead and commented that if she could be any bird, she would surely choose to be a seagull. Three days later, Yeats sent her "The White Birds."[19] As

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[16]Line 34, "They have gone down under the same white stars," supports the assumption that this poem is closely aligned with "The Rose of Peace," for the "white stars" resemble those of "The Rose of Peace."

[17]Reader's Guide, p. 79.

[18]The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 177.

[19]Man and Poet, pp. 67-68.

Miss Seward points out, Yeats compensated for the fact that he could not attain Maud in time by perceiving her as the earthly expression of eternal beauty; that is, he viewed her "as a mortal manifestation of immortal beauty."[20] In "The White Birds," Yeats expresses his longing to be eventually united with Maud's spiritual counterpart. The rose of this poem, accompanied by the lily, is predominantly the short-lived, withering flower of temporality. After stating his wish that he and Maud could be ". . . white birds on the foam of the sea," Yeats writes:

> We tire of the flame of the meteor, before it can
> fade and flee;
> And the flame of the blue star of twilight, hung low
> on the rim of the sky,
> Has awakened in our hearts, my beloved, a sadness
> that may not die.

So, temporal matters eventually become boring; even ". . . those dreamers, dew-dabbled, the lily and rose" exude weariness. In the final stanza, Yeats openly states his longing for the spiritual world:

> I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a
> Danaan shore,
> Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow
> come near us no more;
> Soon far from the rose and the lily and fret of
> the flames would we be,
> Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out
> on the foam of the sea!

Yeats's desire to be forgotten by "Time" and his following rejection of the rose and lily substantiates the premise that the rose is here more nearly temporal. And, although

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[20] The Symbolic Rose, pp. 92, 95.

Yeats seemingly rejects both flowers, it is possible that he places the lily--with its connotations of purity and divinity[21]--with the rose because of its temporal role.

Yeats could not involve himself whole-heartedly in the Irish struggle for independence from England as did so many of his closest friends, including Maud, for he was above all else a poet. He preferred instead to work for his country's freedom on a literary rather than a political, revolutionary basis; "To Ireland in the Coming Times," written twenty-four years prior to the abortive Easter Rebellion of 1916, is, as several scholars have suggested, a defense of the stand Yeats chose to take,[22] but the poem is at the same time a subtle reiteration of Yeats's fascination with the union of the spiritual and the temporal realms and his concept of cosmic woman. He would, he writes, be counted among those "That sang, to sweeten Ireland's wrong,/ Ballad and story, rann and song." He is their equal, he continues, "Because the red-rose-bordered hem/ Of her, whose history began/ Before God made the angelic clan,/ Trails all about the written page."[23] The rose of these lines

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[21]Arnold Whittick, Symbols, Signs and Their Meaning (Massachusetts: Charles T. Branford Company, 1961), p. 207.

[22]As Richard Ellmann notes in Yeats: The Man and the Masks, Dutton (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 117, the poem was initially titled "Apologia Addressed to Ireland in the Coming Days."

[23]Yeats derived the controlling image of "the red-rose-bordered hem" from a vision he had in which he saw a group of people dressed in blue robes with "little roses embroidered on the hems." The incident is described by T. R. Henn in The Lonely Tower: Studies in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats (London: Methuen and Company, 1965), p. 96.

serves a dual purpose, for as it symbolizes the mother country it also evokes the image of woman, substantiating Seiden's comment that in the rose poems Yeats's devotion to Maud and Ireland are often indistinguishable from one another.[24] Here, Yeats is indeed equating the importance of the two; on a higher level, his statement that God created woman (and secondarily, Ireland) before He created "the angelic clan" and his statement in the following lines that when Time began it was woman's dancing feet that "Made Ireland's heart begin to beat," echoes the assertion of "The Rose of the World" that woman was created before the archangels and that the world was created in her honor. So, once again, the rose symbolizes carnal, divine woman and restates Yeats's cosmic sensuousness. In the second stanza of "To Ireland," the "red-rose-bordered hem" is less symbolic of Ireland than it is of woman and man's (Yeats's) longing for the union of the above and the below. His rhymes, Yeats begins, are on a higher plane than those of the specifically political poets, for his rhymes tell "Of things discovered in the deep,/ Where only body's laid asleep" and where ". . . the elemental creatures go" about his table. In this state, Yeats then suggests, man journeys on with these creatures of the unconscious mind "After the red-rose-bordered hem," and, considering all the implications of "rose" and "hem," after unity. It may be that

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[24]The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 64.

Yeats is referring to the poet's dialogue with psychic forces, as Whitaker suggests,[25] but it is also possible--since Yeats uses the general term "man"--that he is referring to all sensitive, responsive men whose minds harmonize with the subliminal world. In the final stanza, Yeats reinforces his longing for a peaceful Ireland; however, his longing for the union of the physical and the spiritual worlds becomes even more pronounced. While in the temporal world, Yeats writes, he will tell of "The love I lived, the dream I knew." But that time is brief, he adds, "and we, our singing and our love," are ". . . passing on to where may be,/ In truth's consuming ecstasy,/ No place for love and dream at all." The final lines of the poem comprise a simple, straightforward statement:

> I cast my heart into my rhymes,
> That you, in the dim coming times,
> May know how my heart went with them
> After the red-rose-bordered hem.

The "them" of line thirteen is ambiguous, for one cannot be certain whether Yeats's heart is with those who sing for Ireland and who write political rhymes for her, or with the "elemental creatures"; that is, with the spiritual. In light of the previous poems, however, his heart is certainly with the latter. In this poem, as in the others, the rose functions on multiple levels. Although it symbolizes timeless, mystical beauty, as Unterecker contends,[26]

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[25]Thomas R. Whitaker, Swan and Shadow: Yeats's Dialogue with History (North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), p. 162.

[26]Reader's Guide, p. 77.

it also symbolizes Ireland on one level and, taken a step higher, suggests cosmic unity and personal "Unity of Being."

Although the rose functions on various levels in The Countess Kathleen, it is unwaveringly subjective and almost always symbolizes the union of the temporal and spiritual. The rose of Yeats's next volume, The Wind Among the Reeds (published in 1899),[27] is quite different. It is no longer, as Stock points out, always the all-inclusive symbol it once was;[28] instead, different aspects of its meaning now receive varying degrees of emphasis from poem to poem. And, as Jeffares says, the poems comprising this collection are both "more refined and more complex" than Yeats's earlier ones. For, he explains, Wilde and Pater had taught Yeats elaboration, the discussions at Rhymer's Club meetings had benefited his technique, and Arthur Symons had introduced him to the Symbolist poets of France. Yeats's verse was steadily becoming more pure but at the same time, Jeffares continues, "a weariness descended on his poetry, in part prompted by the unsatisfactory nature of his love affair."[29] Thus, the poems of this volume suggest Yeats's growing interest in the physical world and in woman as a physical being; in addition, for the first time

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[27]Ellmann, The Man and the Masks, p. 144.

[28]A. G. Stock, W. B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), p. 46.

[29]A. Norman Jeffares, The Poetry of W. B. Yeats (New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1961), pp. 16-17.

the rose may be symbolic of passionate sensuality, divine spirituality, or both.

"Hodos Chameliontos" begins with Yeats's recollections of his desire to establish a Celtic Order of Mysteries in an abandoned castle he had chanced upon on Lough Key in Roscommon.[30] According to Jeffares, Yeats was at least partially motivated by the thought that Maud might become caught up in the plan also and neglect her mushrooming political activities. His desire for "quietism and the Innesfree escapism," Jeffares adds, are reflected in "The Lover Tells of the Rose in His Heart,"[31] one of the first poems in The Wind Among the Reeds. The poem is quite unlike any of the poems Yeats had previously written to Maud; the formerly hopeful tone has been replaced by one of melancholy and doubt. "For the first time in his poetry," Stock offers, "it seems to trouble him that the outside world is not perfectly in accord with a lover's vision."[32] Yeats's new attitude is apparent in the first stanza:

> All things uncomely and broken, all things worn
> out and old,
> The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a
> lumbering cart,
> The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the
> wintry mould,
> Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in
> the deeps of my heart.

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[30] "The Trembling of the Veil," in The Autobiography, p. 169.

[31] The Poetry of W. B. Yeats, p. 17.

[32] His Poetry and Thought, p. 46.

The bubbles of his dreams, Yeats says, are being burst by reality, for he has finally realized that Maud can never fulfill the image of her that he has created. But sincere dreams die slowly, and Yeats's last line implies that his fanciful image of Maud is still unwavering--still blossoming--in his heart. And the fact that she is still symbolized by "a rose" implies further that he still imagines her in every sense that the symbolic rose suggests. The second (and final) stanza of the poem concerns Yeats's desire for isolation that Jeffares mentions:

> The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great
> to be told;
> I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green
> knoll apart,
> With the earth and the sky and the water, remade,
> like a casket of gold
> For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in
> the deeps of my heart.

Yeats's changing sentiment becomes clear when this poem is compared to "The White Birds." In that poem Yeats had expressed his desire to fly away with his beloved--to the spiritual realm; here, Yeats still desires escape, but now he is more interested in the physical world with its earth, sky and water. Although in the second stanza Maud's image has become even further removed from him (for the "your image" of stanza one has become "my dreams of your image"), he has not fully severed himself from the subjective rose; here, it is all-inclusive, suggesting the inextricably bound connotations of Maud/woman/beauty. Nevertheless, Yeats's move toward objectivity has undeniably begun.

During the Christmas holidays of 1897, Yeats visited his family; one morning at breakfast he excitedly recounted a dream he had had during the night. The dream, Hone writes, "gave him that strange and symbolic love poem, 'The Cap and Bells.'"[33] The poem's complexity is underscored by the range of critical opinion concerning it. While Jeffares maintains that it "was but the record of a dream,"[34] Wilson charges that it concerns Yeats's "theory of the celestial body,"[35] and Seiden says it is about the "symbolic Fool, Irish peasants, and . . . primitive folk" who "are treated largely as aspects of an identical human archetype."[36] Although the poem may very well contain certain aspects of all these hypotheses, it may, on the other hand, contain none of them. At any rate, Yeats's explanation--though perhaps understated--is best; the poem was, he said during a lecture, "the way to win a lady."[37]

Yeats addresses his lover in the opening lines of "The Lover Asks Forgiveness Because of His Many Moods" and suggests to her that

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[33]Joseph Hone, W. B. Yeats: 1865-1939 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1943), p. 159.

[34]Man and Poet, p. 96.

[35]F. A. C. Wilson, W. B. Yeats and Tradition (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958), p. 252.

[36]The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 188.

[37]To this comment, Hone writes, Yeats added that "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" was how to lose one, W. B. Yeats: 1865-1939, p. 159.

> If this importunate heart trouble your peace
> With words lighter than air,
> Or hopes that in mere hoping flicker and cease;
> Crumple the rose in your hair;
> And cover your lips with odorous twilight. . . .

In the lines that follow, Yeats indicates to her the very words she should speak. This section "unfolds, tapestry-like," Jeffares says, "mingled strands of pre-Raphaelite romanticism, Gaelic material and unhappy love which Yeats shot through with his mystical symbolism and with touches of modish ninety-ish decadence."[38] The rose of this poem is an all-inclusive symbol, though it is not fully sensual; in fact, sensual connotations are even less evident than in "The Cap and Bells" because of the less sensual subject matter of "The Lover Asks Forgiveness."

Stock maintains that in "The Blessed" and "The Secret Rose" Yeats "seems deliberately to seek elsewhere than in love for the ecstasy of attainment of the Rose." While this much is true, Stock's following assertion that in "The Blessed" "it is in drunkenness"[39] is somewhat short-sighted. In the poem Cumhal has come to discuss the question of blessedness with Dathi. "Praise God and God's Mother . . . ," Dathi advises Cumhal, for they ". . . have sent/ The blessedest souls that walk in the world/ To fill your heart with content." Unsatisfied, Cumhal persists and inquires as to who is most blessed: "Is it these that with

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[38] The Poetry of W. B. Yeats, p. 19.

[39] His Poetry and Thought, p. 46.

golden thuribles/ Are singing about the wood?" It is Dathi's response to this question that Stock might reconsider. ". . . blessedness goes where the wind goes," Dathi answers, and continues:

> And when it is gone we are dead;
> I see the blessedest soul in the world
> And he nods a drunken head.
>
> O blessedness comes in the night and the day
> And whither the wise heart knows;
> And one has seen in the redness of wine
> The Incorruptible Rose,
>
> That drowsily drops faint leaves on him
> And the sweetness of desire,
> While time and the world are ebbing away
> In twilights of dew and of fire.

Whether one worships Bacchus or Christ, Yeats says, there is no sure path to blessedness--it is everywhere and may be attained or realized in multiple ways. Dathi's comment that ". . . one has seen in the redness of wine/ The Incorruptible Rose" contains an allusion to both deities; and blessedness (symbolized by the incorruptible rose) may be seen in the redness of wine--whether that of Bacchus or of Christ. Yeats's rose has at last become as completely sensual as it is divine. And for the first time in the rose imagery, the sheer sensuality of Yeats's increasing predilection for the temporal world has become apparent.

"The Secret Rose" repeats the theme of "The Blessed" but is primarily Yeats's invocation to the "inviolate Rose." The rose of this poem is reminiscent of Yeats's earlier, predominantly spiritual, flower. "Far-off, most secret, and inviolate Rose," Yeats begins, "Enfold me in my hour of

hours. . . ." In these lines Yeats is, as in other rose poems, addressing the unprofaned, pure rose that is found beyond the temporal regions. Yeats is also alluding to Maud Gonne, as Jeffares suggests.[40] After describing those who have already been enfolded by the rose's "great leaves," Yeats writes:

> . . . I, too, await
> The hour of thy great wind of love and hate.
> When shall the stars be blown about the sky,
> Like the sparks blown out of a smithy, and die?
> Surely thine hour has come, thy great wind blows,
> Far-off, most secret, and inviolate Rose?

In these lines, which foreshadow "The Second Coming," Yeats's rose once again expresses his interest in the spiritual realm and unity.

In his unpublished autobiography, Yeats writes:

> At a literary dinner I noticed opposite to me between two celebrated novelists a woman of great beauty. Her face had a perfectly Greek regularity though her skin was a little darker than a Greek would have been, and her hair was very dark. She was quietly dressed with what seemed to me very old lace over her breast and had the same sensitive look of destruction I had admired in Eva Gore Booth. She was it seemed alone of our age to suggest to me an incomparable distinction. I was not introduced to her. . . . We found that she was related to a member of the Rhymers' Club, had asked my name.

Thus began Yeats's love affair with Diana Vernon. He wrote several poems to her, two of which were published in The Savoy in January, 1896.[41] In one of these poems, "The Travail of Passion," Yeats writes:

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[40] Man and Poet, p. 115.

[41] Ibid., pp. 100-102.

When the flaming lute-thronged angelic door is wide;
When an immortal passion breathes in mortal clay;
Our hearts endure the scourge, the plaited thorns, the way
Crowded with bitter faces, the wounds in palm and side,
The vinegar-heavy sponge, the flowers by Kedron stream;
We will bend down and loosen our hair over you,
That it may drop faint perfume, and be heavy with dew,
Lilies of death-pale hope, roses of passionate dream.

They will endure the rage of those who disparage their love, Yeats writes, for their passion is above reproach; it is immortal and, as his imagery suggests, divine. The rose of this poem is more sensuous than any of those preceding it, and as Jeffares notes, its final lines suggest a new "awareness of physical nearness."[42] Yeats's rose has at last reached a fully sensuous plane and is, for the first time, passionate.

In "The Poet Pleads with the Elemental Powers," the final poem of The Wind Among the Reeds containing the symbolic flower, the rose is "Immortal." In the first stanza Yeats writes:

The Powers whose name and shape no living creature knows
Have pulled the Immortal Rose;
And though the Seven Lights bowed in their dance and wept,
The Polar Dragon slept,
His heavy rings uncoiled from glimmering deep to deep;
When will he wake from sleep?

Henn explains these initial lines in his quotation from Yeats's note to the third edition of this volume:

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[42] Ibid., p. 102. In this comment Jeffares includes "Michael Robartes Bids His Beloved Be at Peace," the other poem published at this time.

> I have made the Seven Lights, the constellation of the Bear, lament for the theft of the Rose, and I have made the Dragon, the constellation Draco, the guardian of the Rose, because these constellations move about the pole of the heavens, the ancient Tree of Life in many countries, and are often associated with the Tree of Life in mythology.[43]

In the following stanza Yeats implores the "Great Powers" to "Encircle her I love and sing her into peace" so that his ". . . old care may cease." "Dim Powers of drowsy thought, . . ." he continues in the final verse, ". . . let a gentle silence wrought with music flow/ Whither her footsteps go." Here, the rose--because it is in the possession of the elemental powers--is once again spiritual; the sensual flower has been, for a while at least, lain aside.

In The Countess Kathleen and The Wind Among the Reeds, one may trace the evolution of Yeats's rose from a primarily subjective, personal symbol to a more nearly objective one. As noted, when a young poet Yeats chose that flower to symbolize simultaneously spiritual and temporal woman, Ireland, and the union of the above and the below. As he matured, however, his use of the rose changed and its function began to vary somewhat from poem to poem. As it became less personal, it became more passionate and eventually, as in "The Travail of Passion," sensual. Yeats's use of the rose in the later volume reflected his growing interest in the physical realm. And this interest was paralleled by his increased use of more nearly objective symbols, particularly the stone.

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[43] The Lonely Tower, pp. 252-53.

## CHAPTER IV

## YEATS'S OBJECTIVITY THROUGH THE ROSE AND THE STONE

As Miss Seward notes in "Yeats and Transition," one may trace in the pattern of Yeats's work the "evolution of the mystical, too personal romantic symbol into the firmer, more objective, more adaptable symbol of our time."[1] Yeats's efforts to write more nearly objective verse parallel his efforts to present a more nearly objective face to the world. Jung writes that the self is each individual's major goal, because it is "the completest expression of that fateful combination we call individuality."[2] And to occult initiates, Clymer writes, "Know Thyself" is "the ground and sum of all wisdom."[3] An unusually serious initiate, Yeats devoted much of his life to discovering himself, and at mid-point realized that he could no longer, if he sincerely wished to know his true self and attain complete "Unity of Being," continue to write in the

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[1]Barbara Seward, The Symbolic Rose (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), p. 88.

[2]Carl Jung, The Collected Works of Carl Jung, ed. by Sir Herbert Read, et al., trans. by F. C. Hull (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), p. 238.

[3]R. Swinburne Clymer, A Compendium of Occult Laws (Pennsylvania: The Philosophical Publishing Company, 1938), p. 168.

unbalanced, subjective vein that had colored and weakened his early verse; hence, he could not let the rose continue to dominate his verse. Understanding the specific causes of Yeats's swing from almost total subjectivity to a more nearly balanced, unified stance and the increasing importance of the stone and closely related symbols in his work requires at least a brief look at the events of 1903 and the development of Yeats's theory of the mask.

One evening in February, 1903, Ellmann writes, Yeats went to give a lecture and before speaking was given a letter addressed to him from Maud; she and Major John MacBride had just married in Paris. Yeats went ahead with the lecture and was congratulated but, Ellmann says, Yeats was never able to recall what he had said to his audience: "He was broad-awake and thirty-seven years old, half his life over. What would he do now that his most cherished dream was gone?"[4] Yeats's initial reaction to Maud's sudden marriage was one of shocked disbelief. He had felt sure that Maud would never marry but would instead devote herself to Irish politics. Yeats had believed that if by some chance Maud did choose to marry, she would marry someone who shared her finer interests, namely Yeats himself. "Then," Ellmann writes, Yeats "saw John MacBride, a dashing major of the Transvaal Brigade in the Boer War, but no poet, no occultist, no learned man, in fact, no perfect lover, take the rose he

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[4]Richard Ellmann, Yeats: The Man and the Masks, Dutton Books (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 159-160.

had so long striven for in vain."[5] The immediate years were hardest for him. As Ellmann notes, the Autobiographies that had ended in 1902 was not added to; in fact, there is no personal account of his life and thought from that time until 1908 when Yeats began keeping a diary. For six years he wrote only one poem: "O Do Not Love Too Long."[6] It must not be inferred, however, that Yeats was a completely broken man, for though he was sensitive, he was strong, and his passion was tempered by willfulness. In a short time, slight changes in Yeats's personality became noticeable. As Ellmann explains, nine months after the marriage Yeats went on a lecture tour of America, and "the trip obviously afforded him an occasion to reconsider his way of life. On his return people noticed a change in him; as one of his friends commented, he was externalized." Obviously, Yeats had taken a close look at himself and had not liked what he had seen. He had always repressed instinct--as Ellmann points out, even the affair with Diana Vernon was characterized by "self-conscious purity"--for he felt certain that intelligence, sensitivity and gentleness are the finer, nobler traits one may possess. But all that he had desired, both physically and spiritually, had been usurped by a man Yeats described as a "drunken, vainglorious lout," a man who was, in fact, Yeats's opposite. Rather than doing

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[5] Ibid., p. 166.

[6] Ibid., p. 164.

as some men might in a similar situation, Yeats did not blame Maud; instead, he considered the marriage the result of a flaw in his own soul. Elmann sums up Yeats's reaction:

> Yeats blamed his own timid, critical intellect for restraining his impetuous nature so that when he should have embraced he had feared and qualified and idealized. He had lost the capacity for acting on instinct which men like MacBride, lacking the critical mind, possessed. Maud Gonne's marriage was therefore an indictment; instead of condemning her, he condemned himself, "took all the blame, out of all sense and reason."[7]

Thus, Seiden writes, Yeats began to praise in his work "men who do not abandon instinct for an unobtainable ideal in womanhood; and men who can, in the midst of despair, assume towards life a stoic pose."[8] Yeats's personal attempt to assume such a pose eventually led to his doctrine of the mask.

According to Wilson, Yeats believes that there are two psychological types, subjective and objective,[9] and that all people are characterized by varying degrees of subjectivity and objectivity; that one may choose between the two to some extent resulted in his theory of the mask. The doctrine was developed, Seiden points out, in Estrangement, The Death of Synge, and Synge and the Ireland of His Time. In these essays, Seiden explains,

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[7]Ibid., pp. 165-166.

[8]Morton Irving Seiden, William Butler Yeats: The Poet as a Mythmaker (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1962), p. 59.

[9]F. A. C. Wilson, Yeats's Iconography (London: Gollanez, 1960), p. 42.

> Yeats's Mask is that assumed attitude with which we face the world, as well as the image of ourselves which love helps us to see in our beloved. It is the difference between our opinions about ourselves and the opinions held by others. And it is our psychological defense against being hurt. . . . Yeats conceives of the Mask . . . as a discipline which, if we would be truly happy and truly virtuous, we impose upon ourselves.

The mask we assume, Seiden adds, is "our moral and psychological opposite, the complement to each of our psychological or moral deficiencies"; it is also, he adds, the idealized image of ourselves. By wearing a mask, Seiden continues, we become that which we long to be. Quoting Yeats, Seiden writes, "To be great we must seem so. Seeming that goes on for a lifetime is no different from reality." The first two of these essays were first published in 1909 and the third in 1911,[10] and it was during these years, as well as those immediately preceding them, Ellmann says, that the symbolic mask began to occur in Yeats's writings, replacing the all-important rose of the 1890's.[11]

The symbolic mask has been named by some scholars as the most important symbol of this period, but, as Seiden points out, Yeats began using numerous other symbols at this time, some of which are taken from animal life and the landscape.[12] One of those in the latter category, though Seiden does not mention it, is the stone which in some of the later poetry symbolizes or suggests the mask. This is

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[10] The Poet as a Mythmaker, pp. 60-61.

[11] The Man and the Masks, pp. 171, 187.

[12] The Poet as a Mythmaker, pp. 154-55.

not the stone's first appearance in Yeats's poetry by any means; in fact, it occurs in only five fewer poems than does the rose in the first three sections of The Collected Poems. Despite its prominence in the poems, it has received virtually no attention from scholars. To determine its overall function in the poems necessitates a look at its role in the early poems, followed by a consideration of the changes it undergoes, along with the rose, as a result of Yeats's purposeful objectivity beginning in the first decade of the 1900's.

The stone is perhaps not as important as the rose at first, for Yeats was primarily subjective and the rose suited his subjective needs. Thus, whereas the rose completely controls many of the earlier poems, the stone is a relatively minor symbol. But that Yeats was aware of the stone as a symbol is undeniable in view of his frequent use of it. As mentioned, the stone plays an important part in Celtic myths and legends, including those of the Irish, and Yeats was aware of its presence. As he writes in "Magic": "They say in the Aran Islands that if you speak over-much of the things of Faery your tongue becomes like a stone, and it seems to me . . . that I have often felt my tongue become just so heavy and clumsy."[13] Godstones and cromlechs are alluded to in several of the poems. Yeats was familiar also with the Lia-Fail for, as Jeffares notes, Maud paid

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[13]William Butler Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil, in Essays and Introductions, Collier Books (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), p. 51.

regular visits to it and Yeats sometimes accompanied her.[14] In addition, Yeats, as a dedicated student of the occult, was certainly aware of the alchemic philosopher's stone and its significance as a symbol of unity, just as he was aware of the Rosicrucian rose as a symbol of female sexuality and unity.

Although the stone occurs in numerous poems written by Yeats during his subjective period, it does not begin to reach its symbolic heights until the poems of Responsibilities (1914) and The Wild Swans at Coole (1919). In the earlier poems, the stone is predominantly a symbol of Irish unity, as in "The Dedication to a Book of Stories Selected from the Irish Novelists." The stone also alludes to Irish mythology, as in "A Faery Song" and "Baile and Aillinn," both of which contain references to Godstones and cromlechs. As Jeffares remarks, although The Wind Among the Reeds (1899) had taken "Yeats's thesis of romantic devotion and poetry of essences, . . . to high water mark," indications of his withdrawal may be seen in the poems of In the Seven Woods, published in 1904. In The Green Helmet and Other Poems, published six years later, Jeffares adds, Yeats begins to use new material and new symbols; he turns, Jeffares explains, to contemporary places and events--the Abbey Theatre, Coole, the Galway Races--as subjects for his poetry.

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[14] A. Norman Jeffares, W. B. Yeats: Man and Poet (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 128-29.

In Responsibilities, Jeffares continues, Yeats reaches yet another plateau in his development.[15] As Ellmann explains it, Yeats now speaks less of himself and expresses his own opinions about life through fools, hermits and beggars. The volume is, Ellmann adds, full of indecision: Yeats is unwilling to say beyond a shadow of a doubt that his ancestors' ghosts can hear him, that Parnell's ghost has visited Dublin, or that his friends have attained immortality.[16] Also, the volume reflects the events that so affected and altered his concept of Ireland and art. He has, Jeffares writes, been discouraged by mob violence; has seen ineffective, small-minded politicians at work; has discovered that the Irish public does not appreciate great art. Although, as Jeffares says, Yeats is at this time beginning to structure a new set of symbols,[17] the stone is one of those previously used that occurs throughout Responsibilities.

In Responsibilities, Yeats employs the archetypal stone to suggest the isolation necessary for those who are "honour bred," as in "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Nothing" and in "Paudeen," and to allude to Irish mythology as in "The Hour Before Dawn." More important, however, in "The Three Beggars" and in "The Magi," the stone also symbolizes Yeats's desire for objectivity, and the mask is

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[15]A. Norman Jeffares, The Poetry of W. B. Yeats (New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1961), pp. 19, 23.

[16]The Man and the Masks, pp. 201-202.

[17]The Poetry of W. B. Yeats, p. 25.

suggested in the "stony Mask" Yeats will later mention in A Vision when describing the man of phase ten; "he will wear always that stony Mask," he writes, and adds that "perhaps Moses when he descended the mountain-side had a like stony Mask, and had cut Tables and Mask out of the one rock."[18]

"The Three Beggars" is prefaced and followed by the musings of a crane (Yeats), who laments the fact that because only rubbish comes his way he has nothing to eat. After observing the ridiculous behavior of the three beggars, the crane continues his musings and expresses his hope that his objective pose will someday prove beneficial to him:

> 'Maybe I shall be lucky yet,
> Now they are silent,' said the crane.
> 'Though to my feathers in the wet
> I've stood as I were made of stone
> And seen the rubbish run about,
> It's certain there are trout somewhere
> And maybe I shall take a trout
> If but I do not seem to care.'

Here, although Yeats does not pointedly mention the mask, he does suggest his anti-self by means of the stone. He also reveals, as in "To a Friend," his conviction that the intellectual few are superior to the growing middle class; this points to the theme of isolation that becomes so important in his life and work. This isolation, the trout,

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[18]William Butler Yeats, A Vision, Collier Books (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), pp. 123-24.

and the wetness in which the crane stands foreshadow Yeats's theme of the fisherman-artist.

Yeats's allusion to the mask is more specific in "The Magi." According to Seiden, this poem was written under the influence of Leo Africanus, Yeats's daimon,[19] or anti-self. It describes Yeats's vision of a representation of the Magi who, Ellmann says, need a second miracle to reassure them about the first one.[20] He sees the Magi in his mind's eye, Yeats writes, "Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky/ With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones." Because this simile explicitly mentions stony faces, the image of the mask of stone is stronger than in "The Three Beggars." This line also strengthens what is, apparently, a comparison of the Magi of Christian myth with the "stiff, painted" figurines that Christians use to symbolize them. In "The Three Beggars," the crane stands stone-like "in the wet"; in "The Magi," the stony faces are "rain-beaten." The stone's juxtaposition with water continues in the later verse and, as will be seen, is important in the intricate symbolism of Yeats's later poetry.

The years between the publication of Responsibilities and The Wild Swans at Coole were transitional ones for Yeats. As Ellmann explains, Yeats was middle-aged and had no family of his own. "He needed," Ellmann says, "affection and love,

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[19] The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 66.

[20] The Man and the Masks, p. 200.

and the steadying effect of married life." He decided to write an autobiography, did so, and it was published in 1915.[21] He met and was guided to some extent by Ezra Pound, who, Ellmann says, "breezed into England in 1908, confident and full of information about obscure literature, persuaded that Yeats was the best poet writing in English but that his manner was out of date." Through Pound's criticism and advice Yeats's writing became more concrete;[22] in addition, Yeats became enraptured with the Japanese Noh drama and once again wrote plays.[23] In them, Ellmann says, Yeats discovered the theatre's anti-self and "in his confident moments he felt that he had found and become his own anti-self. His theorizing of so many years seemed to have reached fulfillment; he had lived his pose so long as to be successfully fused into it."[24] Despite his new style and method, however, his personal life remained inadequate; he was an old bachelor and he knew it. He had met Georgie Hyde-Lees in 1911 and found that they shared many interests. Yeats especially admired her "remarkable subtlety and sense of humor," Ellmann says. They were married October 21, 1917; shortly after their marriage Mrs. Yeats tried automatic writing.[25] The ultimate result was A Vision, in which

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[21] Ibid., pp. 208-209.

[22] Ibid., p. 211.

[23] Ibid., p. 213.

[24] Ibid., p. 217.

[25] Ibid., p. 219.

Yeats expounds his symbolic theories. Before considering the fruits of these theories, the major themes and the symbolism of the later poems pertinent to this study must be given attention. These themes include wisdom and isolation, the union of the above and the below, the ascent to the spiritual realm, and, on a more personal plane, Yeats's turn to objectivity, tradition and to classical form. It is not possible to isolate these themes from poem to poem, for each is an integral part of many poems, though one may be stressed more than the others. Yeats achieves this synthesis with a set of inseparable symbols--the fisherman, water, the tower, the house, stairs (ascending), and the mountain. And all of these symbols are invariably linked to the archetypal stone.

If any of these symbols may be labeled most important, it is surely Yeats's tower. In "The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry," Yeats writes that "the tower . . . is, like the sea, and rivers, and caves with fountains, a very ancient symbol"; it is, he explains, "the mind looking inward upon itself."[26] It is, as Cirlot points out, the archetypal "symbol of ascent" and links heaven and earth. "Windows at the topmost level, almost always large in size," he adds, "correspond to the eyes and the mind of man."[27]

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[26] Ideas of Good and Evil, in Essays and Introductions, p. 87.

[27] J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, trans. by Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 327.

Closely related to the tower is the house. Discussing the house, the human body and the cosmos, Eliade says that each "displays . . . an upper opening that makes passage to another world possible."[28] Cirlot says that mystics view the feminine nature of the universe as (among other things) a house. "Another symbolic association," he adds, "is that which equates the house . . . with the repository of all wisdom, that is, tradition itself." Citing Ania Teillard, Cirlot explains that "in dreams, we employ the image of the house as a representation of the different layers of the psyche. The outside of the house signifies the outward appearance of Man: his personality or his Mask." Associated with both the tower and the house is the stairway or the act of ascending.[29] Quoting Eliade, Cirlot writes that steps symbolize "'breaking through' the levels of existence in order to open up the way from one world to another, establishing a relationship between heaven, earth and hell." Cirlot himself maintains that primitive peoples indicated mythic ascension with a mountain that symbolizes the world-axis and with structures having steps. "We have then," he explains, "a synthesis of two symbols--that of the 'temple-mountain' and that of the steps--signifying that the entire cosmos is the path of ascension towards the spirit."[30]

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[28]Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959), p. 174.

[29]Dictionary of Symbols, p. 146.

[30]Ibid., p. 298.

Eliade concurs, saying that the mountain is an image that expresses "the connection between heaven and earth"; also, he adds, our world is holy "because it is the place nearest to heaven, because from here . . . it is possible to reach heaven; hence our world is a high place."[31]

Discussing Shelley's poetry, Yeats mentions water which, he says, is Shelley's "great symbol of existence."[32] And, writing of Homer's cave in Ithaca, Yeats quotes Taylor's translation and says that there is a cave, sacred to the Naiads, where there are "mixing-bowls and jars of stone. . . . and there are great looms of stone . . . and there are waters welling evermore." These stone bowls and jars, he explains, symbolize Bacchus and are consecreated to the Naiads. They are stone, he adds, "because of the rocky beds of the rivers." The stone looms represent

> The "souls that descend into generation." "For the formation of the flesh is on or about the bones, which in the bodies of animals resemble stone," and also because "the body is a garment" not only about the soul, but about all essences that become visible, for "the heavens are called by the ancients a veil, in consequence of being as it were the vestements of the celestial gods." The bees hive in the mixing-bowls and jars of stone . . . because honey was the symbol adopted by the ancients for "pleasure arising from generation."[33]

Water itself, as Eliade points out, "always brings

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[31] The Sacred and the Profane, pp. 38-39.

[32] Ideas of Good and Evil, in Essays and Introductions, p. 85.

[33] Ibid., pp. 82-83.

regeneration." Also, it disintegrates and abolishes forms[34] as in "The Magi." Modern psychologists, Cirlot writes, interpret water as representing "the unconscious . . . the non-formal, dynamic, motivating, female side of the personality. The projection of the mother-imago into the waters endows them with various numinous properties characteristic of the mother." It is also, he says, identified with intuitive wisdom.[35] The "mystic sense of fishing and the fisherman," as Cirlot describes it, is another important aspect of Yeats's symbolism. "Fishing," he explains, "amounts to extracting the unconscious elements from deep-lying sources--the 'elusive treasure' of legend, or . . . wisdom." The fish, he writes, is a mystic, psychic water animal; in addition, the fisherman can work upon life's sources because of his knowledge of water.[36]

Each of these symbols, either because of its own meanings or because of its association with the other symbols mentioned, connotes a rising up coupled with wisdom. And, as mentioned, each is linked to the archetypal stone; this is most obvious in the case of the tower, the house, the stairway and the mountain.

Stone symbolism is important in Yeats's key poem, "The Fisherman." Yeats introduces the symbolic man who is,

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[34] The Sacred and the Profane, pp. 130-31.

[35] Dictionary of Symbols, p. 345.

[36] Ibid., pp. 102-103.

Jeffares writes, Yeats's concept of "ideal character,"[37] the unified man he himself hopes to become. In the first stanza, Yeats compares the state of Ireland as it is to what it ought to be. "All day," he writes, "I'd looked in the face/ What I had hoped t'would be/ To write for my own race." Instead, he continues, he saw reality: hateful living men and lovable dead men, men who are "craven" and "insolent," men who are witty for common purposes, and men who are clever but cry "The catch-cries of the clown." He has seen, he says, "The beating down of the wise/ And great Art beaten down." Scornful of these people, Yeats writes in the second stanza, he has begun to imagine a fisherman, at dawn,

> Where stone is dark under froth,
> And the down-turn of his wrist
> When the flies drop in the stream;
> A man who does not exist,
> A man who is but a dream.

". . . Before I am old," Yeats concludes, "I shall have written him one/ Poem maybe as cold/ And passionate as the dawn." Yeats's fisherman symbolizes the cold, yet passionate, art Yeats now turns to; disappointed in his hopes for Ireland because of the nature of the Irish race, he is turning from public affairs and committing himself to his art just as the fisherman turns himself to fishing. And his art must achieve classical perfection, matching the perfection of the "down-turn" of the fisherman's wrist. The poem is,

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[37] Man and Poet, p. 174.

then, primarily an expression of Yeats's conviction that isolation is necessary if the artist is to create; it is also an expression of his turn to classical method and tradition. That the fisherman ascends to a place where stones lie under water--and here Yeats is surely referring to Ben Bulben--indicates that Yeats is again considering the spiritual realm and, in addition, indicates that when he attains a more nearly objective state, becoming more like the ideal fisherman/artist, he will be spiritually regenerated. But these lines also suggest that Yeats has not as yet reached this state; it is still but a dream. Yeats's closing pledge to himself reiterates his earlier premise that unity requires harmonious proportions of objectivity and subjectivity and also suggests the rebirth and spirituality which that unity will bring about. In addition, the poem's austere elements, particularly "cold," work in conjunction with "stone" to suggest the increased objectivity and classical method Yeats strives for. The imagery and symbolism of the poem reveal the loneliness and necessary isolation of men who dedicate themselves to art. But as Yeats's closing lines intimate, the perfection he will achieve will satisfy him.

"Ego Dominus Tuus," Jeffares writes, was published along with Per Amica Silentia Lunae and reflects Yeats's interest at that time (1915) in the clash between the personalities within a person, "the self and the anti-self." It is a dialogue between Hic and Ille; Hic, Jeffares

explains, defends objectivity and Ille defends subjectivity. And, Jeffares adds, "there is some sense in a contemporary Dublin comment that Hic and Willie would be more correct."[38] Elmann concurs, and adds that in the poem Yeats employs the term "anti-self" because it is more theoretical and abstract than "mask."[39] In the poem's opening lines, Hic speaks to Ille who, he says, is walking in the moonlight "On the grey sand beside the shallow stream/ Under your old wind-beaten tower." His description of the stream (which suggests regeneration) as "shallow" and the stone tower (which suggests wisdom) as "old" and "wind-beaten" is fitting for, as Hic says, Ille has ". . . passed the best of life. . . ." Despite age, however, Ille still traces "Enthralled by the unconquerable delusion,/ Magical shapes. In the following lines, Yeats expresses the goal he has set for himself: "By the help of an image/ I call to my own opposite, summon all/ That I have handled least, least looked upon." Discussing Dante's desire to write of an exalted lady because of his own lecherous life, Ille speculates that Dante ". . . fashioned from his opposite/ An image that might have been a stony face." Continuing, Ille says that Dante ". . . set his chisel to the hardest stone." In these comments and in those concerning Keats, it seems that the opposite is the artist's creation; the concluding

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[38] Ibid., p. 193. Ellmann, in The Man and the Masks, p. 197, attributes the comment to Ezra Pound.

[39] The Man and the Masks, pp. 197-98.

lines, as Ellmann says, imply supernaturalism. Yeats is not giving his readers any very concrete answers; as Ellmann notes, Yeats has not clarified his philosophy of the daimon, or anti-self.[40] Although this poem does concern the anti-self, the mask is implied in "stony face" and again symbolizes Yeats's personal need for a less subjective personality and suggests his need to discover his own opposite, or anti-self. The lines quoted above imply that the artist's struggle is not an easy one; as in "The Fisherman," however, Yeats writes of the rebirth that will take place when he does at last unite his personality, repeating the imagery of the opening stanza:

> I call to the mysterious one who yet
> Shall walk the wet sands by the edge of the stream
> And look most like me, being indeed my double,
> And prove of all imaginable things
> The most unlike, being my anti-self,
> And, standing by these characters, disclose
> All that I seek. . . .

Here, the theme of regeneration is strengthened by the "wet sands" and "the stream." In these two poems, as in "The Three Beggars" and "The Magi," the stone is primarily symbolic of the mask Yeats now wears and of that new climate of reality in art praised in "The Fisherman." And, by uniting water and stone imagery in this poem, Yeats suggests the regeneration coming from unity of being and the subsequent renewal of wisdom.

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[40] Ibid., pp. 81, 198.

Before proceeding to the next section, Yeats's new emphasis on sexuality and some of the theories culminating in A Vision must be considered. In the earlier verse, as Ellmann points out, Yeats ignores sexual matters; this is evidenced by the relationship of Oisin and Nian in the narrative poem, The Wanderings of Oisin (1889). In the original Irish myth, Ellmann points out, the couple sleep together; in Yeats's version they dance, travel and kiss only occasionally. Here, Ellmann says, Yeats "prefers the state of temptation or of half-seduction."[41] As Seiden mentions, however, the Theosophists had taught Yeats

> that primordial energy in the universe is entirely sexual; that religious or mythological symbols have sexual meanings; and that cycles and antinomies represent, symbolically, the conflict and union of the archetypal male and the archetypal female.[42]

Yeats's tentative probes in this direction are in evidence in the rose poems which, as has been seen, become increasingly sensual. Finally, Seiden says, in "Anima Hominis" (completed in 1916 and 1917) Yeats expresses his belief that there is no difference in sexual desires and spiritual life,[43] recalling his earlier equation of earthly and divine elements. Yeats's belief was strengthened by his marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees. His energies, Ellmann writes, were released like a spring; for the first time he could truly enjoy a relationship with a lover. He tremendously liked

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[41] Ibid., p. 81.

[42] The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 35.

[43] Ibid., p. 69.

the role of husband and father and later wrote, Ellmann says, that "the marriage bed is the symbol of the solved antinomy."[44] During the 1920's and 1930's, Seiden adds, sexual love became one of Yeats's major themes.[45] Whereas Ellmann simply mentions the worldly humor of poems such as "Solomon and the Witch," and "Solomon to Sheba,"[46] Seiden contends that the later poems are very unrestrained; Yeats would describe, he writes, "complete abandon and complete or exhausting fulfillment in sexual union."[47] According to Ellmann, Yeats saw sexual love as "a conflict of opposites" but also as a means of escaping that conflict to unity and wholeness.[48] Elaborating, Seiden maintains that Yeats believed that through sexual love men and women find themselves entangled in a "profound mystical rapture." As a result, Seiden explains, "they are released from the limits of the temporal world; and they communicate with the deepest reaches of their own very beings, with Anima Mundi, and with God."[49] The representation of sexual union with a fitting set of symbols could, then, symbolize the perfect unity that Yeats was seeking.

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[44] The Man and the Masks, p. 221.

[45] The Poet as a Mythmaker, pp. 317-18.

[46] The Man and the Masks, p. 221.

[47] The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 318.

[48] The Man and the Masks, p. 268.

[49] The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 318.

A Vision permitted Yeats to bring together many of the theories that had been tentatively formed, then hinted at in some of his works. It also introduced several new elements. In the former category there are his previously rather vague concepts of the mask and self and anti-self, and the question of objectivity and subjectivity; in the latter, there are the gyres and cones that he now uses to explain and elaborate his theories. Of the several concepts developed in Yeats's A Vision, only that concerning objectivity and subjectivity and their relationship to the gyres is pertinent to this study. Explaining Yeats's system, Ellmann writes that personality falls into one of twenty-eight classifications, which are represented by the twenty-eight phases of the moon; this is pictured as a Great Wheel. Classification depends upon the degrees of objectivity and subjectivity comprising the personality.[50] Complete subjectivity, Seiden explains, is found at phase fifteen (at the full moon) and complete objectivity at phase one (at the dark moon). As Seiden points out, it is at phase 15 that Yeats places the "Rose of Beatitude." Souls pass around the Wheel until they are "purified of sexual desire" and eventually escape to Anima Mundi; in addition, the Wheel symbolizes the phases of the individual lifetime.[51] As numerous scholars have noted, Yeats places himself in the seventeenth phase, just barely on the way to objectivity and still,

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[50] The Man and the Masks, p. 223.

[51] The Poet as a Mythmaker, pp. 75-77.

apparently, full of sexual desire. As Seiden points out, Yeats's explanation of objectivity and subjectivity is none too clear, even when worked out in A Vision.[52] It is most important to remember, however, that the soul, as Ellmann says, is never completely one or the other; instead it has elements of each in varying degrees, making possible Yeats's attempts at increased objectivity.[53] A new symbol was mentioned in Mrs. Yeats's automatic writing on December 6, 1917, Ellmann writes; it was a whirling cone, or gyre. A picture of two such interlocking cones--one objective, the other subjective--was, Ellmann continues, "drawn in the script and related to European history, which was considered to pass like the human soul through a cycle from subjectivity to objectivity." These cones, Ellmann remarks, gave Yeats "a splendid image to represent the antinomies which had always been present in his mind."[54] As noted, Yeats considers the union of male and female a perfect symbol of the resolved antinomies;[55] thus, it is especially significant that he symbolizes objectivity and subjectivity as interlocking cones, for, as Koch notes, the triangle ( $\triangle$ ) is another sign for the female element and the reversed triangle ( $\nabla$ ) is a sign of the male element.[56] As Ellmann

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[52] Ibid., p. 76.

[53] The Man and the Masks, p. 226.

[54] Ibid., p. 228.

[55] A Vision, p. 211.

[56] Rudolf Koch, The Book of Signs (United States: Dover Publications, 1930), p. 3.

points out, "the interpenetrating gyres have an obvious sexual symbolism"[57] and "are symbolic of sexual love."[58] In a more detailed discussion, Seiden writes that

> Cycles and gyres inevitably represent for Yeats the varying states of human sexuality . . . the impotence of childhood, the sensuality of youth and maturity, the impotence of old age (the second childhood), and that sexual reawakening possible in another life or Anima Mundi.[59]

During his mature years, Yeats continues his attempts to write more nearly balanced, unified verse by employing both objective and subjective symbols in every poem. When the subjective rose and the objective stone occur in these poems, they represent everything that they have in the past and, when paired, each is the other's anti-self, symbolizing Yeats's own struggle to unite his subjective and objective selves, ultimately achieving "Unity of Being." Paired, the two symbols can represent perfect unity because they represent the perfect union of male and female. Though at first the metamorphosis of Yeats's rose from one of sweet innocence and exalted beauty to one of sexuality may seem striking, the change is not so drastic as it appears, nor is it sudden. The rose becomes, as has been seen, increasingly sensual even in the early poems, before Yeats chooses temporarily to drop it. Blake, of course, had a profound effect on Yeats and because Yeats was familiar with Blake's

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[57] The Man and the Masks, p. 229.

[58] Ibid., p. 261.

[59] The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 200.

philosophy and poetry, he could hardly have ignored Blake's blatantly sexual "sick rose." Yeats's participation in Rosicrucian rituals reinforced his growing awareness of the rose as a symbol of not only female sexuality but also perfect unity. As an active member of the Golden Dawn, Yeats was thoroughly versed in the significance of that society's most important symbol, a rose and cross, which, Seiden says, symbolized "love and sacrifice, eternity and time, and the resolved antinomies."[60] Even more important, however, is the fact that, as Waite points out, "the mystery of Rosicrucianism--at the highest--is one of Divine union."[61] Going a step further, Senior explains that the symbol of the rose superimposed on a cross represents the Rosicrucian conception of the universe as a unity of opposites achieved at higher states of occult discipline; it represents, he says, the union of the sexes.[62] At this point it must be noted that, as Miss Seward points out, the concept of the rose as the archetypal symbol of woman and her sexuality has been echoed most recently by Freud, who maintains that blossoms and flowers in general represent the female sexual organs and that the shape of the rose suggests the vulva. This thought has been modified somewhat by Jung, she adds,

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[60] Ibid., pp. 44-45.

[61] Arthur Waite, The Holy Kabbalah (New York: University Books, 1965), p. 579.

[62] John Senior, The Way Down and Out: The Occult in Symbolist Literature (New York: The Greenwood Press, 1968), pp. 43-44.

who in a more traditional vein says that the rose's circular shape also indicates unity or wholeness.[63]

The stone, Suelzer points out, occurs throughout the Old Testament; its term is "masseba" or "erected thing." "In monarchic Israel," he writes, "the massebot took on evil connotations because of their relation to Canaanite fertility cults." These rites, Suelzer explains, were characterized by a sacred stone pillar, "sometimes in phallic form," which was associated with the male deity.[64] Moreover, in many cultures, according to McGuire, stones "were venerated as symbols of the male generative power and of female fecundity."[65]

Yeats's increasing use of sexual themes may be seen in Michael Robartes and the Dancer (1921). In fact, as Seiden notes, the first poem of this section, "Michael Robartes and the Dancer," concerns sexual desire.[66] In this section, Yeats employs both the rose and the stone. The rose occurs in "The Rose Tree" which is, as Wilson says, "political poetry."[67] In it Yeats decries the new patriotism prevalent in Ireland, whose present condition

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[63]The Symbolic Rose, p. 7. Yeats may have been aware of Freud's theory for, according to Seiden in The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 69, Yeats had either read or heard about Freud's work.

[64]A. Suelzer, "Stones, Sacred (in the Bible)," New Catholic Encyclopedia, XIII, 725.

[65]M. R. P. McGuire, "Stones, Sacred," New Catholic Encyclopedia, XIII, 725.

[66]The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 279.

[67]Yeats's Iconography, p. 212.

he symbolizes as a withering rose tree. This image expresses, as Jeffares notes, the difference between his own youthful ideals and those of the current patriots;[68] the image of the withering rose tree is developed with sensuous symbolism and suggests regeneration: in the second stanza, Yeats comments that the rose tree needs only to be watered.

> To make the green come out again
> And spread on every side,
> And shake the blossom from the bud
> To be the garden's pride.

The stone is used in "Easter, 1916." Ellmann explains that though Yeats had at first been "indignant with the Dublin insurrectionaries" for giving their lives needlessly, he gradually came to view their deaths as noble; "Easter, 1916" is their eulogy.[69] Seiden briefly comments that the stone of this poem is just one of the many unifying symbols Yeats uses in his attempt to resolve the antinomies.[70] In this poem the all-inclusive stone is, on one level, predominantly representative of the seemingly unobtainable nationalism the patriots are dying for. They have only one purpose, Yeats says, and ". . . seem/ Enchanted to a stone/ To trouble the living stream." Their determination to bring about the Irish nationalism symbolized by the stone is so strong that they seem spellbound. They live from minute

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[68] Man and Poet, p. 188.

[69] The Man and the Masks, p. 217.

[70] The Poet as a Mythmaker, p. 159.

to minute, Yeats continues, and the stone--the desire for unity and spiritual regeneration--is ". . . in the midst of all." This line lends cosmic importance to the struggles of the Irish patriots, for here Yeats implies that the desire for unity is at the center of man's being.

The stone is an especially important symbol in The Tower, published when Yeats was sixty-three years old. At this time Yeats was already at the height of his career; he was internationally known and had been awarded the Nobel Prize four years earlier. Despite literary acclaim, however, Yeats was not fully satisfied with himself and, Ellmann writes, the poems of The Tower, written from 1922 to 1927, are marked with bitterness. The reasons are numerous: his father had died in 1922, his hope that writing would come easier after A Vision was unsatisfied, and the Irish civil war had broken out. But overshadowing all else is Yeats's approaching old age. He wrote Mrs. Olivia Shakespear in 1922:

> I am tired & in a rage at being old, I am all I ever was & much more but an enemy has bound me and twisted me so I can plan & think as I never could, but no longer achieve all I plan & think.[71]

Jeffares writes in Man and Poet that Yeats's "remedy for age was a search for intellectual interests. Though this appeared new to him in 'The Tower' . . . it is but the old youthful desire to conquer bodily inclinations and live

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[71]The Man and the Masks, p. 241.

a lonely life of wisdom."[72] This statement is true, but misleading, for it suggests that Yeats considers "bodily inclinations" something to be stifled. Jeffares' comment in The Poetry of W. B. Yeats is more satisfying but again misleading; referring to "The Tower," Jeffares writes that Yeats "was torn between passionate regret for the waning of physical strength and desire to 'make his soul' with things of the mind and spirit."[73] It must be made clear that the "waning of physical strength" that Yeats abhors is directly related to the waning of his own sexuality. And Yeats is not "torn between" these things; he is not willingly turning from physical passion to devote himself to wisdom; rather, as he says in "The Tower," he will concentrate his energy on wisdom only when he is no longer capable of passion. The crux of the matter is that old age will no longer allow him to enjoy the best of the physical and intellectual worlds; no longer capable of realizing the one, he is forced to seek solace in the other. But although he cannot practically join the two, he can continue to write poetry that is both passionate and cold. And in this way, he may still achieve unity on an aesthetic plane. His increasing objectivity and his turn to wisdom is indicated by his decision to entitle this section The Tower; it is a choice that imitates his decision to call those poems of the predominantly

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[72] Man and Poet, p. 233.

[73] The Poetry of W. B. Yeats, p. 42.

subjective period The Rose. The fact that Yeats's tower is made of stone strengthens its force as the objective symbol of wisdom, unity and male generation. Yeats's feelings are made clear by the images and symbols he employs in "The Tower." By this time the symbols developed in A Vision are present in his poetry; the tower, as Ellmann points out, suggests the gyres which in turn symbolize the union of "spirit and matter or heaven and earth,"[74] and, of course, man and woman. The first lines of "The Tower" repeat the thoughts he had written to Mrs. Shakespear:

> What shall I do with this absurdity-
> O heart, O troubled heart--this caricature,
> Decrepit age that has been tied to me
> As to a dog's tail?
> Never had I more
> Excited, passionate, fantastical
> Imagination, nor an ear and eye
> That more expected the impossible.

The following lines do not imply that Yeats will be pleased when, passion dulled by age, he will have to ". . . be content with argument and deal/ In abstract things. . . ." The image here of Yeats in his boyhood climbing Ben Bulben's back with his rod and his fly in his hands suggests the fisherman. In "Towards Break of Day," written earlier, Yeats creates a similar image and, saying that memory magnifies youthful delight, writes that if he touched the mountain side now, he would feel only "cold stone and water. . . ." These complex images suggest both the innocence and subjectivity of childhood and the wisdom and

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[74] The Man and the Masks, p. 239.

objectivity that, hopefully, increase with maturity. The sexual imagery and the symbols that Yeats uses in this first short section when describing his boyhood suggest his presently waning sexuality. In Section II of "The Tower," Yeats writes, "I pace upon the battlements and stare/ On the foundations of a house, or where/ Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth." The battlements are, of course, made of stone; this image and that of the house's foundations both suggest Yeats's turn to "the lonely life of wisdom." In addition, the former image suggests that it is wisdom that endures and the second suggests that that wisdom is the origin. As Cirlot says, the house reflects the feminine nature of the universe and also, because of its upper openings, suggests ascension from one plane to another. It also suggests Yeats's mask. Yeats's juxtaposition of this image with that of the male, phallic tree that juts from the earth and points upward exemplifies his method of using masculine/feminine symbolism to represent all the aspects of unity that so fascinate him. Physical union, the union of the above and the below, the act of ascending to the spiritual realm, and wisdom are just a few of the values evoked by these three very complex lines, and indicate Yeats's use of subjective and objective symbols.

In a following verse, Yeats writes of Red Hanrahan, his own creation, and recalls some of Hanrahan's wild activities. He drove Hanrahan, Yeats writes, ". . . drunk or sober through the dawn" and Hanrahan ". . . stumbled, tumbled,

fumbled to and fro/ And had but broken knees for hire/ And horrible splendour of desire." Hanrahan represents Yeats's former subjective, passionate self; his following comment that he needs his "mighty memories" of Hanrahan indicates his unwillingness to surrender the physical passion and activities of his youth. In the next verse, Yeats again employs sexual images and symbols; one of these, "Plunge, lured by a softening eye,/ Or by a touch or a sigh,/ Into the labyrinth of another's being," is a fine example of Yeats's use of sexual union as a symbol of the resolved antinomies. "It is time that I wrote my will," Yeats begins in Section III. He chooses to inherit his pride

> . . . upstanding men
> That climb the streams until
> The fountain leap, and at dawn
> Drop their cast at the side
> Of dripping stone. . . .

In these sensuous lines, the boy of the opening stanza has become the mature fisherman. This is an obvious allusion to "The Fisherman," in which Yeats begins to stress wisdom and his intent to write equally subjective/objective poetry. The stone is, as previously noted, representative of Yeats's need for unity, his turn to the intellect and his turn to objectivity; here, the "dripping stone" takes on definite masculine connotations and, as in the past, suggests regeneration. A bit further, Yeats says:

> I have prepared my peace
> With learned Italian things
> And the proud stones of Greece,
> Poet's imaginings
> And memories of love,
> Memories of the words of women.

In these lines it becomes clear that although Yeats may no longer be capable of physical passion, personal harmony now entails the union of the intellect and the passionate memories of love and women. Here, Yeats uses objective and subjective content (wisdom, love) and objective and subjective symbols (stone, woman) to symbolize the permanent peace he seeks in "Unity of Being." Jeffares' assertion that Yeats strives to turn from "bodily inclinations" to "a lonely life of wisdom" is probably based on Yeats's closing lines, "Now shall I make my soul,/ Compelling it to study/ In a learned school." But it is clear from Yeats's choice of the word "compel" that this will not be easy for him; it is not what he desires to do. This is not to say, however, that Yeats does not desire wisdom; it is simply that in this matter, as in all others, he wished for unity. And his desire to remain passionate does not contradict his turn to objectivity for, as noted, Yeats views sexual union as perfect union and can do so since man may represent objectivity and woman may represent subjectivity.

"Meditations in Time of Civil War," writes Jeffares, is a record of Yeats's conversations with troops and Irregulars[75] and is in seven sections; in Section II, subtitled "My House," the rose and the stone meet. In the first stanza, Yeats describes the grounds surrounding his home:

> An ancient bridge, and a more ancient tower,
> A farmhouse that is sheltered by its wall,
> An acre of stony ground
> Where the symbolic rose can break in flower,

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[75] The Poetry of W. B. Yeats, p. 46.

Old ragged elms, old thorns innumerable,
The sound of the rain or sound
Of every wind that blows;
The stilted water-hen
Crossing stream again
Scared by the splashing of a dozen cows.

There is no disunity comparable to that produced by civil war; uninvolved--physically, at least--Yeats takes refuge at his home where the stone tower and the "symbolic rose" stand side by side and peace and harmony remain possible. And this suggests the peace and harmony Yeats hopes to realize by wearing his objective mask and by finally uniting his subjective and objective selves. On another level, Yeats is again expressing his increasing emphasis on wisdom; his mention of the stone tower and the stone wall surrounding his farmhouse makes this quite clear. In this key stanza, Yeats joins the rose and the stone to symbolize the union of opposites--the union of the objective and the subjective, passion and intellect, man and woman, the above and the below, etc.--and the peace that results from that union. The sexual connotations are reinforced by "water," "stream," and "splashing" used in rapid succession in the last three lines of the stanza; these, in turn, suggest the theme of regeneration so prominent in these poems. Inside, Yeats writes in the second stanza, there is "A winding stair, a chamber arched with stone,/ A grey stone fireplace with an open hearth,/ A candle and written page." As noted, the winding stair symbolizes the accent to the spiritual realm; here it indicates the spiritual rebirth that will result from the turn to wisdom and increased objectivity.

The additional mention of the stone strengthens the image of unity and the wisdom that the candle and the written page suggest. "Two men have founded here . . . ," Yeats writes in the closing stanza; one is a man-at-arms who, with his men, ". . . seemed castaways/ Forgetting and forgot." The other is Yeats himself who, he writes, his heirs may find, "To exalt a lonely mind,/ Befitting emblems of adversity." The former is the partial man of action and the latter is the more nearly unified, isolated, man of wisdom. In this important poem, Yeats finally brings together the rose and stone symbolism that has so richly marked his preceding poems. Joining these two seeming opposites in his mature period, Yeats expresses symbolically the peace and contentment that characterize the unified man.

Yeats uses the symbolic stone in three additional sections of "Meditations in Time of Civil War." In "Ancestral Houses," the stone is predominantly a symbol of the harmony desired by violent, bitter men. In addition, the title suggests the traditional, classical wisdom of "The Fisherman." In "My Descendants" and in "The Stare's Nest by My Window," the stone is a metaphor for Yeats's home and evokes all of the images of "My House"; in addition, it suggests permanence and strength.

Both the rose and the stone occur in The Winding Stair and Other Poems (1933). They are used again in Last Poems (1936-1939). In The Winding Stair, the rose is primarily spiritual in "Death." Yeats's use of the stone in

"Coole Park, 1929" is interesting, for here the ". . . broken stone" suggests disunity. Most important to this study, however, are the stone tower and the stairs of "A Dialogue of Self and Soul" and "Blood and the Moon." Commenting on The Winding Stair Yeats writes:

> In this book and elsewhere, I have used towers, and one tower in particular, as symbols and have compared their winding stairs to the philosophical gyres, but it is hardly necessary to interpret what comes from the main track of thought and expression. Shelley uses towers constantly as symbols, and there are gyres in Swedenborg, and in Thomas Aquinas and certain classical authors.[76]

Between 1926 and 1932, Ellmann notes, Yeats was twice close to death, and as death approached, Yeats turned towards life; he continues, Ellmann adds, his attempts to make "all emotion and all impersonal." However, Ellmann continues, "he by no means abjured the pursuit of wisdom, but he declared firmly now that the wisdom he had in mind was not the saint's wisdom, and that beatitude, if it implied total escape from the wheel of reincarnation, attracted but did not win him." As Ellmann points out, Yeats loves life, not holiness, and declares his stance in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," written in 1927. Discussing the poem, Ellmann explains that the soul calls the self to "'the winding ancient stair'" and offers to deliver the self from rebirth, taking him to heaven if he will only let his "'imagination scorn the earth.'"[77] But Yeats, still

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[76]William Butler Yeats, The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), p. 456.

[77]The Man and the Masks, p. 257.

certain that earth is holy, refuses. Instead, as Ellmann notes, Yeats's self proclaims the soul's right to live and live again; the following dialogue presents alternating arguments "for rebirth and for escape from birth."[78] Speaking to Yeats's self in Section I, Yeats's soul says: ". . . I summon to the winding ancient stair;/ Set all your mind upon the steep ascent." Here, the stairway of Yeats's stone tower is once again primarily symbolic of the ascent to the spiritual realm. Yeats refuses because he views life as divine; he cannot possibly ascend the stairs into the higher realm, for if he did he would be denying the earth its divinity and would be, in effect, denying his quest for the union of the two realms.

In 1927, Ellmann writes, Yeats was deeply touched by the assassination of Kevin O'Higgins, an Irish statesman. As a result of the incident, Yeats wrote "Blood and the Moon."[79] In Section I, Yeats says, "Blessed be this place,/ More blessed still this tower," and in Section II he adds, "I declare this tower is my symbol; I declare/ This winding, gyring, spiring treadmill of a stair is my ancestral/ stair." In these few lines, Yeats's stone tower and stairs again bring to mind ascension, wisdom, objectivity, and various aspects of unity. The "gyring" stairway, in particular, suggests the union of male and female. That the stairway is "ancestral" reiterates Yeats's turn to

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[78] Ibid., pp. 258, 272.

[79] Ibid., p. 266.

traditional, classical wisdom previously mentioned in "The Fisherman" and in several of the poems in "Meditations in Time of Civil War"; Yeats's description also implies the theme of reincarnation.

Yeats continued to write until his death in 1939, and many of the poems written and revised during the final years of his life are among his most powerful. Both the stone and the rose are important symbols in Last Poems. "The Gyres," Unterecker writes, announces the theme of this final collection; it concerns, he says, Yeats's belief that history reverses itself and that civilization then starts anew. Thus, all of the things that man concerns himself with are really of little significance.[80] "THE GYRES! the gyres! Old Rocky Face, look forth;/ Things thought too long can be no longer thought," Yeats begins; everything is changing and "We that look on but laugh in tragic joy." As Unterecker points out, critics have attempted to pinpoint the meaning of "Old Rocky Face." Some, he says, have suggested that Yeats is referring to his mask or to Shelley's Ahasuerus; Unterecker himself suggests that the image might refer to the craters of the moon that controls the gyres.[81] It is almost certain, however, that Yeats is referring to a mountain, Ben Bulben in particular. The image may very well, of course, refer to all of these things. It is definitely

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[80] John Unterecker, A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats (New York: The Noonday Press, 1964), p. 257.

[81] Ibid.

Yeats's mask, for, as the first stanza says, artists and philosophers (himself included) are looking on the scene below. This, coupled with the suggestion of the stony mountain that the fisherman/artist climbs, suggests again Yeats's need for increased objectivity, the wisdom and isolation of the artist, the union of the above and the below and ascension. Yeats can ". . . laugh in tragic joy" because with the death of one civilization there is the birth of another; this suggests the theme of unity and regeneration developed in the earlier poetry.

"Lapis Lazuli," writes Unterecker, involves the rise and fall of civilizations, the end of the present one, and the victory of artists and philosophers "over the 'tragedy' of mere events."[82] It begins and ends, Seiden says, with differing views towards man's suffering. In the closing stanzas of the poem, Yeats writes of three Chinamen who, carved in a stone, gaze down from the top of a mountain.[83] Describing this scene, Stock writes: "here is art, like Rocky Face aware of human suffering and still rejoicing, and all around him are people so panic-stricken because their world is ending that art says nothing to them."[84] Ideally, these artists and philosophers can laugh at the seemingly tragic scene below because of their wisdom and because of

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[82] Ibid., p. 258.

[83] The Poet as a Mythmaker, pp. 153, 253.

[84] A. G. Stock, W. B. Yeats: His Poetry and Thought (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), p. 223.

their more nearly balanced, harmonious states of mind. Their wisdom and unity are suggested by the stone mountain they stand upon and the stone on which the figures of the Chinamen are carved. It is "hysterical," overly subjective people who place undue emphasis on mere events; it is the creator and thinker who knows "All things fall and are built again,/ And those that build them again are gay."

Stock maintains that "The Three Bushes" is "an allegory of the body and the soul of love, and the lover, not either of the women, was the central figure"; the lover, he adds, is Yeats who, like the lover, sings a song.[85] Briefly, the poem tells the story of a lady who, wanting her lover to be able to sing beautiful love songs, agrees to sleep with him. But she finds she cannot, for she would, she says, "drop down dead" if she lost her virginity. So, her chambermaid goes to him every night, since ". . . we are all the same/ Where no candles are." While riding to see his lady one year later, the lover falls from his horse and dies. His lady, seeing it all, dies also.

> The chambermaid lived long, and took
> Their graves into her charge,
> And there two bushes planted
> That when they had grown large
> Seemed sprung from but a single root
> So did their roses merge.

Then, when the chambermaid was dying, she confessed these events to her priest, who later had her buried beside the lover and his lady. He then, Yeats concludes,

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[85] Ibid., pp. 234-35.

> . . . set a rose-tree on her grave,
> And now none living can,
> When they have plucked a rose there,
> Know where its roots began.

In this poem, the rose is the perfectly balanced, divine and sensuous symbol that Yeats was striving for in the earlier verse. The merging rose bushes growing on the lady and the lover's graves suggest the divine, physical union of man and woman; the rose-tree set on the chambermaid's grave that merges with the first bush strengthens this. The lady of this poem has not attained "Unity of Being"--she is overly objective, all reason. So, although Yeats himself is turning to objectivity and relates this repeatedly in his poetry, one must not assume that he wishes to become totally objective; this would, obviously, prevent unity as it has done in the lady's case. The poem is important, also, because it picks up the theme of the holiness of the earth and the sensuousness of divine elements begun in the earlier poems.

The last of Yeats's poems, "Under Ben Bulben," is, as Stock says, Yeats's "most carefully explicit confession of faith."[86] The title Yeats chose indicates the great significance Yeats attaches to Ben Bulben and, considering his struggle to attain "Unity of Being" while emphasizing wisdom, it was fitting that he request to be laid in the shadow of that great stone mountain. Stanzas II and IV are of primary importance to this study because each reiterates

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[86] Ibid., p. 236.

two of Yeats's more important themes. In the first of these, he writes:

> Many times man lives and dies
> Between his two eternities,
> That of race and that of soul,
> And ancient Ireland knew it all.
> Whether man die in his bed
> Or the rifle knocks him dead,
> A brief parting from those dear
> Is the worst man has to fear.
> Though grave-diggers' toil is long
> Sharp their spades, their muscles strong,
> They but thrust their buried men
> Back in the human mind again.

This is Yeats's message to the world, the message that he touches upon in "The Gyres" and in "Lapis Lazuli": man has nothing to fear from death for death signals rebirth. Also, as in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul," the body is the soul's only hope. In the first part of Stanza IV, Yeats expresses the artist's purpose; it is, he says, to unite man and God:

> Poet and sculptor, do the work,
> Nor let the modish painter shirk
> What his forefathers did,
> Bring the soul of man to God,
> Make him fill the cradles right.

Then, in the second part, Yeats writes:

> Measurement began our might
> Forms a stark Egyptian thought,
> Forms that gentler Phidias wrought.
> Michael Angelo left a proof
> On the Sistine Chapel roof,
> Where but half-awakened Adam
> Can disturb globe-trotting Madam
> Till her bowels are in heat,
> Proof that there's a purpose set
> Before the secret working mind:
> Profane perfection of mankind.

The first lines of this stanza describe cold, classical objective art--an art that arouses passion. The forms and

the emotions they evoke symbolize the union of the divine and the sensuous, which is, as Yeats describes it, profane and perfect. In the following stanza, Yeats implores Irish poets to learn their trade and sing about the peasantry and hard-riding men, "The holiness of monks, and after/ Porter-drinkers' randy laughter." Again, the physical and the spiritual are joined. Finally, in the closing stanza, Yeats composes his epitaph:

> Under bare Ben Bulben's head
> In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid.
> An ancestor was rector there
> Long years ago, a church stands near,
> By the road an ancient cross.
> No marble, no conventional phrase;
> On limestone quarried near the spot
> By his command these words are cut:
>
> Cast a cold eye
> On life, on death.
> Horseman, pass by!

Jeffares writes that

> the three final lines imply that a cold eye is to be cast on life and on death because this is the ultimate challenge which he had been facing all his life and which he thought must be faced with bravery, with heroic indifference, with the aristocratic disdain of the horseman.[87]

As the closing lines indicate, Yeats is prepared to meet the ultimate test of his lifelong speculation--death. The entire stanza repeats the theme of reincarnation introduced in Stanza II; hence, the final three lines also imply that there is no reason for anyone to mourn his passing; the worst that has happened is a parting from friends. Also important is

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[87] The Poetry of W. B. Yeats, p. 62.

the fact that he does not want his epitaph cut in marble but in limestone. While marble is ornamental it is impure; limestone, on the other hand, is a building stone and is a part of Ben Bulben. It is, then, a fitting symbol of Yeats's cold, objective turn to wisdom and classical tradition. "Under Ben Bulben," as has been noted, is Yeats's "confession of faith"; it is surely his great testament poem. The prominence of the great stone mountain, Ben Bulben, and his use of limestone in the poem indicate how very central stone imagery is in his poetry.

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